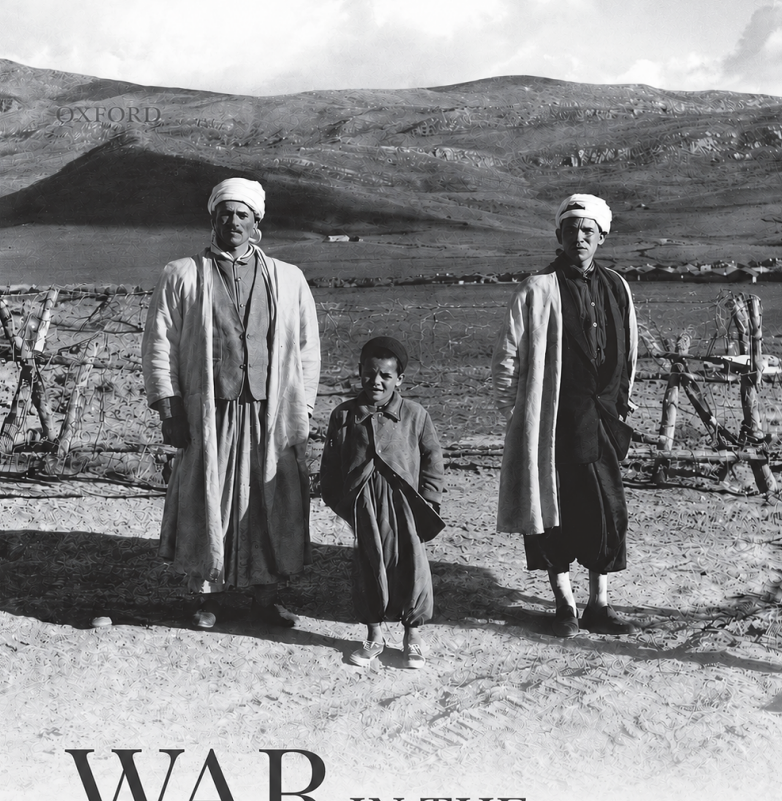

WAR IN THE MOUNTAINS

Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958

NEIL MACMASTER

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List of Abbreviations

AI	*Affaires indigènes*
ALN	*Armée de libération nationale*
AMG	*Aide médicale gratuite*
AML	*Ami du Manifeste et de la libération*
ANP	*Archives nationales* (Pierrefitte)
ANPA	*Armée nationale du people algérien*
AOM	*Archives nationales d'outre-mer* (Aix-en-Provence)
APC	*Assemblée populaire communale*
ASSRA	*Adjointes sanitaires et sociales rurales auxiliaires*
AUMA	*Association des Ulema musulmans algériens*
CCA	*Comité de coordination et d'éxecution*
CDL	*Combattants de la libération*
CEP	*Certificate d'étude primaire*
CFLN	*Comité française de libération nationale*
CGT	*Confédération générale du travail*
CHEAM	*Centre des hauts études sur l'Afrique et l'Asie modernes*
CHPT	*Companie de haut-parleurs et de tracts*
CIE	*Centre d'informations et d'études*
CIPCG	*Centre d'instruction, pacification et contre-guérilla* (Arzew)
CM	*commune mixte*
CNRA	*Conseil national de la révolution algériennne*
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CPA	*Chef politico-militaire*
CPE	*commune de plein exercise*
CPL	*Chef des renseignements et liaison*
CRHR	*Commission à la reconstruction et à l'habitat rurale*
CRUA	*Comité révolutionnaires d'unité d'action*
CTT	*Centre de tri et de transit*
DFA	*Délégation financières algériennes*
DGR	*Doctrine de guerre révolutionnaire*
DPU	*Dispositif de protection urbaine*
DRS	*Defense et restauration des sols*
DST	*Direction de la surveillance du territoire*
ECPAD	*Établissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la defense* (Fort-Ivry, Paris)
EMSI	*Équipes medico-sociale itinérantes*
ENA	*Étoile nord-africaine*
FAAD	*Front algérien d'action démocratique*
FEM	*Fédération des Élus musulmans*

FIDES	*Fonds d'investissement et de développement économique et social*
FLN	*Front de libération nationale*
FSRC	*Fédération des sinistrés de la région de Chélif*
GAD	*Groupe d'autodéfense*
GG	*Gouvernement générale* (Algiers)
GPRA	*Gouvernement provisoire de la république algérienne*
HLM	*Habitat à loyer modéré*
IGAME	*Inspecteur général de l'administration en mission extraordinaire*
MNA	*Mouvement national algérien*
MP	*Monographie politique*
MTLD	*Mouvement pour la triomphe des libertés démocratiques*
OI	*Officiers itinérantes*
OPA	*Organisation politico-administrative*
OR	*Officier de renseignements*
OS	*Organisation spéciale*
PAC	*Plan d'action communale*
PCA	*Parti communiste algérien*
PCF	*Parti communiste français*
PJ	*Police judiciaire*
PPA	*Parti du peuple algérien*
RG	*Renseignements généraux*
RN	*Route nationale*
SAH	*Service de l'amélioration de l'habitat*
SAS	*Section administrative spécialisée*
SDECE	*Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage*
SMP	*Section de modernisation du paysannat*
SIEGFM	*Section d'instruction des élèves-gradés français-musulmans*
SIP	*Société indigènes de prévoyance*
SLNA	*Service des liaisons nord-africaines*
SMIG	*Salaire minimum garantie*
SPC	*Syndicat des petits cultivateurs*
UDMA	*Union démocratique du manifeste algérien*
UFA	*Union des femmes d'Algérie*
UGTA	*Union générale des travailleurs algériens*
ZI	*Zones interdites*
ZOA	*Zone Ouest Algérois* (military operational zone)
ZOK	*Zone opérationnelle de Kabylie*

Glossary

açabaya	solidarity of the Muslim community
agha	second rank honorific title of a senior *caid*
Algérie française	the political slogan of those wishing to keep Algeria as a French colony
aman	a ceremony of surrender or clemency
aménagement	development planning
arrondissement	local administrative area, corresponding to a sub- prefecture
ayla	the patriarchal, joint-family household
bachaga	first rank honorific title of a senior *caid*
bakhchiche	bribes, often demanded by *caids*
baraka	charismatic power
bechara	cattle rustling
beylik	pre-colonial Turkish state
bidonvilles	shanty towns
bled	the isolated rural interior
bocca	local term in the Chelif region for a fraction
cadi	a Muslim magistrate or judge
café maure	Arab café usually run by and for Algerians
caid	local administrator of a *douar*
chahid [plural chahidad]	martyr(s)
cheikh	master, chieftain
cheufa	hereditary religious élite*çof* a clan or patron-client grouping
colon	European settler, usually a landowner
commerçant	shopkeeper, tradesman
commune de pleine exercice	urban municipality under control of European electors
commune mixte	rural commune inhabited mainly by Algerians
Conseil d'État	council of state
Conseil général	departmental council
dar-el-harb	land of the infidel
dar-el-Islam	land of believers
dechra	hamlet
Délégations financières	the elected quasi-parliamentary body in Algiers
délegués spéciaux	municipal councilors appointed under the communal reform of 1956
déracinement	the process of uprooting of the peasantry
djebel	mountains or sierra
djellabah	long, flowing peasant garb
djemâa	traditional assembly of rural community

djihad	holy war
djouad	warrior élite
djounoud	soldier
douar	rural commune (originally a circle of tents)
État-major mixte	joint civil-military committee
fantasia	ritual cavalry charge during a festival
fellaghas	rural guerrillas (pejorative)
fraction (or *ferqa*)	the smallest administrative unit, subdivision of a *douar*
garde champêtre	field guard, usually operating with the *caid*
garde forestier	guard employed by the forestry service
goum	a unit of the conscripted North African soldiery
gourbis	a peasant croft
grande famille	influential aristocratic family holding military, religious, or political functions
haouz	piedmont, the rural zone close to an urban centre
hammam	Turkish baths
harka	common name for an indigenous unit attached to the French army
harki	auxiliary soldier in a *harka*
hijra	religious flight
imam	religious leader of a mosque
jacquerie	traditional peasant uprising
juge de paix	justice of the peace
kasma	smallest FLN sub-division of a Zone (*mintaqa*)
katiba	an FLN guerrilla unit of about one hundred soldiers
kebir	headman or chief of a local fraction
khammès	sharecropper
khodja	clerk to the *commune mixte* administrator
kouba	a saint's shrine
mahakma	Muslim court
marabout	holy man (or shrine) descended from a saintly lineage
matmores	silo for storing grain, often underground
mechta	farm house or hamlet, a winter house
medersa	a religious secondary school often of the *Ulema*
melk	privately owned land
mintaqa	FLN zone, a sub-division of the *wilaya*
mokhadem	devotee of a religious brotherhood
moudjahidine	male ALN combatant
moussebilines	active civilian supporters to the guerrilla forces
muphti	Islamic jurist
nachid	nationalist hymn or song
nahia	an FLN region, sub-division of a *mintaqa*
nizam	FLN organization at the *douar* level, also known as the 'OPA'
petits blancs	'poor white', lowest class of European settlers
pieds-noirs	common name for European settlers

pistes	dirt tracks, often open to vehicles in the dry season
quadrillage	Army control by a dense network of military posts
ralliement	collective surrender of a rural community
ratissage	a military sweep and search operation
razzia	a destructive raid often carried out by cavalry
regroupement	military relocation of peasantry into resettlement camps
roumi	European 'infidel'
soudure	the lean time of the year before the next harvest
statut personnel	personal status (i.e. as a Muslim)
taam	a collective feast
taleb	Muslim teacher or scholar
talghouda	a wild, edible root foraged by peasants during famines
twiza	a peasant sharing of collective labour (harvest, house construction, etc.)
Ulema	religious scholar or a member of the AUMA
umma	the universal community of the Muslim faithful
wilaya	one of the six areas into which the FLN divided Algeria
zaim	a charismatic leader
zaouia	monastic-type religious centre of the confraternities, often a place of pilgrimage and Islamic study
zekkat	the Muslim duty to give charitable aid, often a tenth of income
zone interdite	French military free-fire zone in the interior

Introduction

Towards a Social History of Peasant Society

Travellers passing along the rich, irrigated valley of the Chelif River are constantly aware of the ochre line of the escarpments of the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains that hem in the plain to the north and the south (Map 1). The physical geography of the region is defined by the striking contrast between the natural corridor of the long valley, once an ancient inland sea, and the forested massifs. For millenia waves of conquering armies, from the Romans and Arabs to the Ottoman Turks and French, had invaded and settled this strategic corridor, but were never secure from the warlike Berber tribes of the mountains that engaged in predatory raids on the rich cereal-producing valley and its line of communications and frontier posts. Central states, such as that of the Ottomans, unable to permanently occupy and impose a bureaucratic control over the turbulent Berbers, relied on a system of indirect rule through which the *makhzen* tribes of the plain negotiated tribute and taxes from the 'free' mountain population in the 'land of dissidence' (*bled-el-sibha*).

While French invaders had by 1843 succeeded through brutal burned-earth tactics in crushing tribal resistance in the Dahra and Ouarsenis, the colonial regime continued to fear the potential of the mountain peasants to rise in bloody insurrection, a fear that eventually came to be fully realized with the 1954 War of Independence. The geography of the Chelif region, with the close relationship of plain to mountain, a natural 'bandit country', provided ideal conditions for irregular warfare and was selected by both the Algerian Communist Party (PCA) and the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) as a redoubt for their guerrilla forces.[1] French counterinsurgents, as well as historians, following the classic Maoist formulation of the partisan as a fish in water, perceived the guerrillas as crucially supported by the peasantry that provided an inexhaustible supply of fighters, guides, cooks, messengers, look-outs, and mule transporters, and at the same time provided an intimate knowledge or intelligence in relation to the everyday politics of each family, their weapons and clan networks, and the resources of the mountain environment, its secret tracks, caves, and springs.

[1] In 1962 the Ouarsenis was likewise chosen as the location for an abortive guerrilla of the *Organisation armée secrète* (OAS), as it was from the 1990s onwards by Islamist rebels that were still operating there in 2014.

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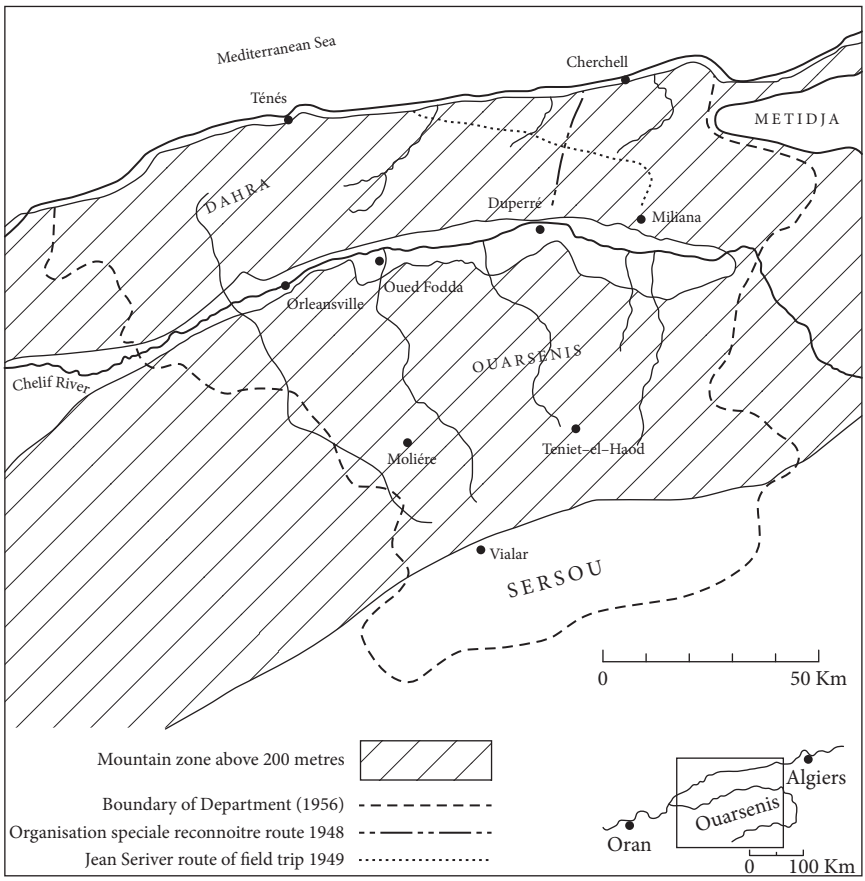


Map 1 Map of the Chelif region, corresponding to the department of Orleansville (1956). The cross-mountain itinerary of the paramilitary *Organisation spéciale* (OS) in 1948, and of the ethnologist Jean Servier in 1949, are indicated. Mapping by Peter Gibbs.

In January 1957 the colonial government and military, adopting a master-plan devised by the ethnologist Jean Servier, selected the Dahra and Ouarsenis region as the location for a major experiment in counterinsurgency code-named *Opération Pilote*. Research for this book began as a case study of the relationship between anthropology and twentieth-century counterinsurgency. The discipline of anthropology developed from the mid-nineteenth century through to the 1950s as an integral part of European colonialism and historically ethnologists had played a direct role in informing or advising counterinsurgency (COIN) operations from Indonesia and the Philippines to Madagascar, Indochina, and Namibia. Academic interest in this relationship, how 'anthropology goes to war', increased dramatically after 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and

Iraq, when COIN strategists revived an interest in how social science and a cultural and linguistic knowledge of 'archaic' tribal societies could be used as an instrument of military intervention and control of peasant communities. In the twenty-first century anthropology seemed to offer, once again, a magic key to the little understood and secret world of the Iraqi and Taliban tribal peasants.

My interest in *Opération Pilote* derived from the fact that recently opened French archives gave access to a considerable volume of previously classified material on the operation, enabling a rare 'inside' perspective. The ethnologist Jean Servier, instead of acting as an academic ivory-tower adviser to the military, both designed the global project and took a direct role in its implementation during operations in the Chelif. *Pilote* thus seemed to offer excellent possibilities for a case-study that could throw light on the relationship between anthropology and counterinsurgency. However, as the research advanced the project began to mutate and move in a new direction. It became increasingly clear that it would not be possible to provide a critical assessment of Servier's ethnography, and of the *Pilote* experiment, without a better background knowledge of the peasant society that was the object of this experiment.[2] As the American and NATO experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has now revealed these vast operations, both catastrophic failures, were launched on the basis of the most shallow understanding of the background history of these societies, an ignorance that later academic research into tribal organizations has uncovered after the event.[3] With this in mind, my research for *War in the Mountains* that progressed as the events in Iraq and Afghanistan were unfolding began to push back in time to explore the earlier, pre-insurrectionary history of the world of the peasants through a social history 'from below'.

As the project developed I was struck by the paucity of academic work on the history of the Algerian mountain peasants that constituted both the majority of the global population of the colony and the key support during the liberation struggle.[4] The conditions for independent research on modern rural society through the study of Algerian archives or fieldwork became ever more difficult

[2] Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, *Opération oiseau bleu: des kabyles, des ethnologues et la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997) had already demonstrated the importance of such contextualization when she brought her specialist knowledge as an anthropologist and historian of Kabyle peasant society to provide a devastating critique of Servier's key role as an 'expert' in an earlier COIN operation code-named '*Oiseau bleu*'.

[3] See Rob Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War. Culture and Pragmatism: A Critical History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011).

[4] The unusual absence, until quite recently, of a 'subaltern' approach to the socio-political history of the Algerian peasantry can be traced to a complex of factors, among them a Marxist academic tradition that denied agency to the peasant class, the official FLN post-independence historiography and commemoration that has reduced the peasantry to a heroic one-dimensional stereotype, and a history of nationalism that has been written from a central, top-down, and urban perspective. On these issues, see Emmanuel Alcaraz, *Les lieux de mémoire de la guerre d'indépendence algérienne* (Paris: Karthala, 2017); Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The Urban Bias in Research on Civil War', *Security Studies* 13.3 (2004), 1–31; and Benjamin Stora, 'La faiblesse de la représentation paysanne dans la direction du movement

after 1962, as the regime sought to occlude the role of the 'internal' ALN forces that politically opposed the 'external' forces of Ben Bella and Boumedienne, as well as the failure of the agrarian socialist 'revolution' that had prioritized investment of oil revenues in industrialization and state collective farms, while largely abandoning the peasantry of the interior.[5] Fanny Colonna, the most eminent sociologist of rural Algeria, in a close analysis of the field, concluded in 1987 that research had barely moved beyond the colonial paradigm.[6]

In particular there was an absence of research on the politics of rural society precisely for the window of time between 1918 and 1954 during which the forces of anti-colonial nationalism began to develop.[7] This 'dark age', the absence of regional, micro-level investigation of the early roots of peasant insurrection, meant that there was little to go on to provide a comparative or analytic framework for understanding the Chelif region. When in 1949 Jean Servier undertook his first field trip as a student ethnologist into the interior of the Dahra mountains (Map 1) he described an archaic society that was so isolated that it preserved a way of life that was unchanged since classical times, a kind of terra incognita that was, he claimed, unknown even to the anthropologists of the University of Algiers, a mere hundred kilometres to the east.[8] The historian Xavier Yacono, who lived and researched in Orleansville between 1934 and 1955, in his monumental study of the settler colonization of the Chelif valley intimated that documentation for the *douars* of the interior (Map 2) was thin and difficult to interpret.[9]

Djilali Sari carried out some of the earliest socio-economic work on the peasantry of the Ouarsenis in the 1970s, particularly valuable on land-dispossession, demography, and a colonial-induced ecological crisis, but he had little to say about

nationaliste algérien à la veille du 1e novembre 1954', ch. 3 in *Le nationalisme algérien avant 1954* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010), 167–85.

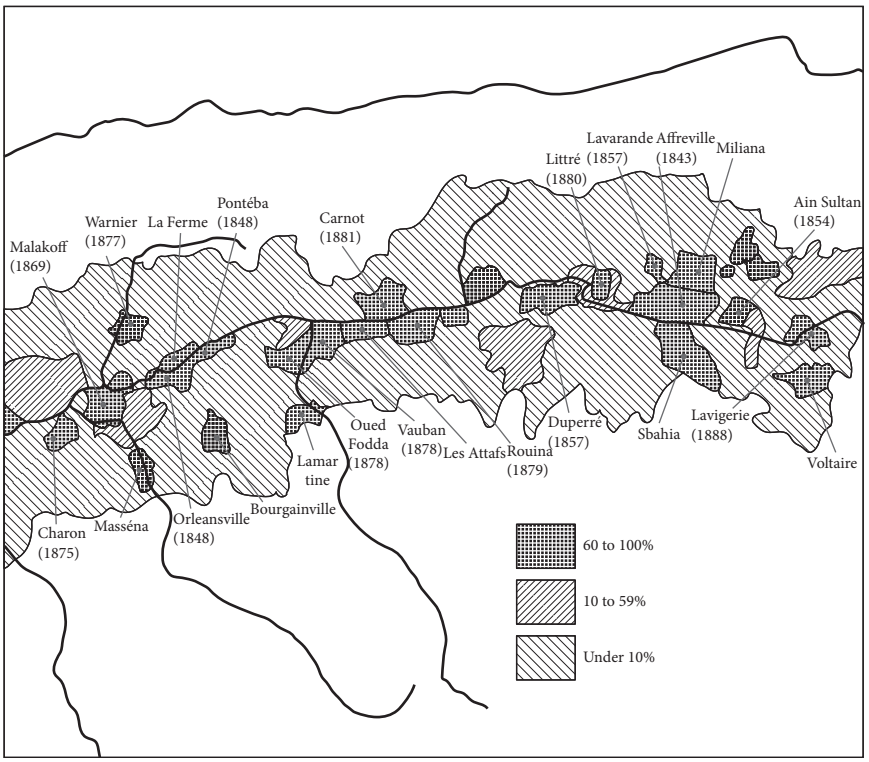
[5] Researchers wishing to carry out fieldwork in rural Algeria were repeatedly hampered by the state. A small team, appointed in 1963 by Mohammed Harbi a councillor in the President's office, and led by the anthropologist Jeanne Favret-Saada, was closed down with Harbi's arrest after the 1965 coup: see Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Algérie 1962–1964. Essais d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Éditions Bouchène, 2005), 10–11; another research team investigating rural society under Claudine Chaulet was likewise closed down in 1975, see Mohamed Benguerna et al. (eds), *La conquête de la citoyenneté. Hommage à Claudine Chaulet* (Algiers: Barzakh/NAQD, 2012), 97, 272–3.

[6] Fanny Colonna, *Savants paysans, éléments d'histoire sociale sur l'Algérie rurale* (Algiers: OUP, 1987), 10–35, 70–1.

[7] I had noticed this paucity of research during an earlier project on labour migration to France: see my article, 'The "Dark Ages" of Colonialism? Algeria 1920–1954', *Bulletin of Francophone Africa* 1 (1992), 106–11.

[8] Jean Servier, *Dans l'Aurès sur les pas des rebelles* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1955).

[9] Xavier Yacono, *La colonisation des Plaines du Chélif (De Lavigerie au confluent de la Mina)* (Algiers: E. Imbert, 1955–6), 1.8. As we will show the archival sources are in fact rich and extensive. It is noticeable that the influential comparative work of Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, ch. 5 'Algeria', relied heavily on Yacono's book, which avoids examination of the rural interior.



Map 2 The percentage of landed property owned by Europeans *c.*1917, in the rich, irrigated plain of the Chelif Valley. The dates of the foundation of settler townships between 1848 and 1888 indicates the process of urbanization. Mapping by Peter Gibbs.

links between this and the rise and consolidation of rural radicalism.[10] It was over thirty years after independence before the first, but rather disappointing, doctoral thesis appeared on nationalist resistance in the Chelif.[11]

The lack of academic investigation of the peasant roots of insurrection in the Chelif after 1918 was typical of the situation to be found across the vast space of northern Algeria, with the notable exception of Kabylia.[12] Since the mid-nineteenth century French soldiers, administrators, and politicians developed an intense interest in the region, linked to the so-called 'Kabyle myth', founded on the idea that the Berber inhabitants belonged to an ancient ethnic people that in their culture and traditions were closer to Europeans than to the Muslim Arabs and

[10] I return to the work of Djilali Sari, as well as two anthropologists, Jacques Lizot and Jacques Vignet-Zunz, who carried out fieldwork in the Ouarsenis during the 1960s, in Chapter 2.

[11] Nacéra Aggoun, 'La résistance algérienne dans le Chélif algérois de 1954 à 1962', University of Paris 8, 1995.

[12] To an extent this is also true of the Aurès, the prime hub of peasant insurrection in 1954, that has been a focus of anthropological investigation.

maintained democratic practices through their village assemblies.[13] Kabylia has attracted huge attention from historians and sociologists of rural nationalism since it provided the early cockpit of the 1954 insurrection and many future leaders of the FLN. This prominence has been linked to the high level of schooling and literacy, commercial and trading links, early emigration to France, contact with trade union, communist, and Messalist movements, and the particular democratic and legal systems of the villages.[14] Academic research on Kabylia has led to some of the most brilliant investigations and theorization of mountain societies, including that of Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad that has had an enormous impact on Algerian studies and the wider field of sociology.[15]

The question of the extent to which the debate surrounding Kabylia and Bourdieu's sociology provides a comparative framework for understanding the Chelif region raises a complex of issues, but here I focus on two points. Firstly, Bourdieu, like many 'Marxisant' historians and sociologists of the 1960s, followed the orthodox socialist perspective that illiterate, subsistence peasants were incapable of developing a political consciousness. According to this teleology class struggle could only develop among waged labour, the urban and industrial proletariat, and the flame of revolution could only be transmitted into archaic rural societies by a vanguard of militants.[16] Bourdieu, like the Communist Party, denied agency to the peasantry and thus reinforced the widespread view that they were not meaningful actors in the anti-colonial struggle, a position that in part explains why historians have neglected investigation of rural society that was seen as largely irrelevant to the story of nationalism.

[13] Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995); Judith Scheele, *Village Matters: Knowledge, Politics and Community in Kabylia (Algeria)* (Oxford: James Currey, 2009).

[14] There is an extensive literature on Kabyle society, politics, and nationalism: see, for example, Jean Morizot, *L'Algérie Kabylisée* (Paris: J. Peyronnet, 1962) and *Les Kabyes: propos d'un témoin* (Paris: CHEAM, 1985); and the important study of Alain Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie XIXe–XXe siècles. Anthropologie historique du lien social dans les communautés villageoises* (Paris: Éditions Bouchène, 2006).

[15] See especially Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* (Paris: Minuit, 1964); Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisses algériennes*, edited by Tassadit Yacine (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics and Ethnographic Practice, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

[16] Pierre Bourdieu in *Travail et travailleurs en Algérie* (Paris: Mouton, 1963), 2.308–12, described the uprooted, illiterate peasants (*sous-prolétaires*) that had moved to the urban slums as incapable of understanding, in a rational way, the causes of their extreme poverty (*le misérabilisme*) that they ascribed to a cruel fate. Bourdieu disagreed with Fanon: the uprooted peasant could only see himself as a victim of a cruel God, and was reduced to a 'pessimistic fatalism, founded on the conviction that it was absurd to struggle against an all-powerful vicious destiny'. They were incapable of arriving at 'a true revolutionary conscience', unlike regular, waged labour that could arrive at 'a systematic and rational understanding of the colonial system such as it was'. Bourdieu came close here to reproducing the classic, Orientalist discourse of the 'Arab' as a fatalist (*mektoub*), incapable of invention or progress. See F. Colonna, *Savants paysans*, 71–4, for a critique of Bourdieu and 'the paradigm of uprooting (*déracinement*)'.

A second key element in the historiography of Kabylia, exemplified by the work of Hugh Roberts, has more fruitful implications for an understanding of the Chelif region. Since his early fieldwork in Kabylia in the 1970s Roberts has developed the thesis that the FLN as a movement was not only influenced by French 'Jacobin' conceptions but equally, if not more so, by the traditional political norms of the countryside and, in particular, by the self-governing institutions of the village assembly, the *djemâa*.[17] *War in the Mountains* arrives at conclusions that are largely in agreement with Robert's interpretation of nationalism, an approach that tallies with a new, emerging social history which is laying emphasis on the deep continuities that run like a bedrock through the precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of Algeria. The conventional historiography of colonial Algeria during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been predominantly a narrative of interminable violence and disruption, military occupation, dislocation of tribal organization, land seizure, mass famine and epidemics, cultural and social dislocation, a long and bloody war of decolonization, followed by post-Independence coups, and a cruel Islamist civil war during the 1990s.[18] In contrast to this story of unremitting crisis, disruption, and regime change, a new and growing body of research on Algerian social history has begun to identify how deeper social and cultural forces remained surprisingly resilient and enduring beneath the surface of turmoil and violent change.[19] James McDougall, in his *History of Algeria* (2017), notes the 'enduring social solidarities' that remained extraordinarily robust and resilient, so that Algerian history can be viewed as much as one of continuities as of ruptures.[20] Jocelyne Dakhlia has emphasized the need to restore agency to Algerians as a co-player in the post-1830 interface (*rencontre*) between colonizer and colonized, while Raphaëlle Branche has explored the extent to which the French were never able to eradicate deep precolonial cultural meanings of time

[17] Hugh Roberts, 'The FLN: French Conceptions, Algerian Realities', ch. 8 in George Joffe (ed.), *North Africa: Nation, State, and Region* (London: Routledge, 1993), 111–41; this appears in a revised version as ch. 2 in *The Battlefield. Algeria 1988–2002. Studies in a Broken Polity* (London: Verso, 2003), 34–62.

[18] On the colonial history of Algeria as one of unremitting violence, see Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, exterminer. Sur la guerre et l'État colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

[19] Of particular note is the extensive research and publications of Fanny Colonna, Omar Carlier, Marc Côte, Didier Guignard, Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, Sylvie Thénault, Christine Mussard, Annick Lacroix, Hannah-Louis Clark, Julien Fromage and Camille Lacoste-Dujardin. Many of these historians have contributed to Abderrahmane Bouchène, Jean-Pierre, et al. (eds), *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale (1830–1962)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012). On the recent growth in social history, see Muriel Cohen and Annick Lacroix, 'Introduction', to a special edition 'Between France and Algeria: The Social History of Algerians in the Twentieth Century', *French Politics, Culture and Society* 34.2 (2016), 1–10.

[20] James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), 3–5; see also Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique: histoire et société* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1983), 148, despite French imposition of its own political, economic, legal and cultural system, Algerian society retained, 'beneath the network of European institutions its own patterns.... Thus the traditional social and mental structures continued to survive', and 'the apparatus of colonial state power seems to be moulded over the ancient order'.

and space.[21] A key aim of this study is to show how just such continuities operated in the Chelif region.

The approach of *War in the Mountains* is in essential agreement with Hugh Roberts, and in particular with his insistence on the need to break away from the widely held view of the uniqueness of the Kabyle political tradition for a recognition that the self-governing village assemblies (*djemâa*) could be found across the Tell, the entirety of northern Algeria, including the Ouarsenis and Dahra, and both Berber and Arabic-speaking regions.[22] Robert's critique of Kabyle exceptionalism is necessary for his global thesis that the core political values of the FLN throughout the War of Independence and the postcolonial era arose from contact with rural society and the political culture of the *djemâa* across the entire geographical space of Algeria.

As we will show, the colonial government and military recognized the dangers of the 'Kabyle myth' that had led it to focus its counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in the Kabyle region in 1956, with catastrophic consequences. The specialists of the Psychological Warfare 5th Bureau led by Colonel Goussault and Jean Servier recognized that it was a fatal mistake to locate the key experiment in counterinsurgency in Kabylia. Here the FLN could not be dislodged since it had already taken deep root in a region of dense nucleated village settlements, but operations should be transferred into the Chelif, a zone of dispersed settlement in which the FLN was thought to have obtained little purchase. *Opération Pilote* was launched in the Chelif in January 1957 on the recognition that the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains were typical of the pattern of scattered peasant populations to be found across nine-tenths of the Tell, and thus offered the possibility of a model experiment that could then be applied to the rest of Algeria, with the exception of the Kabyle enclave, where geopolitical conditions were similar.

The heavy focalization of Algerian studies on Kabylia and the paucity of research on other parts of the Tell was by 1995 impeding the line of enquiry suggested by Hugh Roberts. Without this it was not possible to make comparisons between the regions and to gauge the extent, or way in which, Kabylia was exceptional or shared common features. In his most recent book, *Berber Government*, Robert has moved in the opposite direction to such an agenda through a micro-study of Great Kabylia that has once again reverted to, and emphasized, the unique features of the Kabyle democratic tradition.[23] As geographers like Marc Côte have shown, Algeria has a complex diversity of regional spaces, a rich mosaic of differing environments, culture, ethnicity, and traditions

[21] Jocelyne Dakhlia, '1830, une rencontre?', in A. Bouchène et al. (eds), *Histoire de l'Algérie*, 142–9; Raphaëlle Branche, '"Au temps de la France". Identités collectives et situation coloniale en Algérie', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 117.1 (2013), 199–213.

[22] H. Roberts, 'The FLN', 119.

[23] Hugh Roberts, *Berber Government: The Kabyle Polity in Pre-Colonial Algeria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

that also share deep, underlying features.[24] *War in the Mountains* by providing an in-depth study of a non-Kabyle region is intended to make a contribution towards the process of opening the door to future local studies that will make possible a better informed comparative approach to rural nationalism and the precise conditions under which it emerged across Algeria.

In order to do this I have adopted an interpretive framework for the understanding of peasant society and politics that takes into account the extraordinary dualism of space that was generated by French colonialism.

The Dualism of Space: The Political Economy of the Chelif Region

Part I looks first at the remarkable geo-politics of the Chelif region (Maps 1, 2, and 3) in which the European domination of the rich, irrigated agricultural region and urban centres of the plain was in stark contrast to the vast rocky and infertile massifs to the north and south where the peasantry, small agro-pastoral subsistence farmers, scraped a living through cultivation of tiny patches of land, and herding in the surrounding forests.

Historians have widely debated the economic logic of such dualism, which was a global feature of late colonialism, mainly in relation to the economic impacts of capitalism and the development of regimes in which European agriculture, mines, and factories were able to act as parasites upon underdeveloped regions by tapping into their reservoirs of cheap migrant labour, areas in which the cost of demographic reproduction was born by the peasant family.[25] The mountain regions of the Chelif certainly acted as a pool of cheap migrant labour that the farmers of the rich latifundia in the plain could draw on when needed, especially during the seasonal harvest periods. However, the geographical dualism of the Chelif region was far more than an expression of economic factors, or of a capitalist logic of under-development, but also a political space that over a long period of time was ideologically shaped by the colonial state to assure the domination of settler society located in the *commune de plein exercice* (CPE), the urban municipalities of the plain, over the *communes mixtes* (CM), the 'native reserves' of the mountains. What I shall refer to as the 'CM system' constituted a form of indirect rule of a type that could be found throughout the French and British empires, in which a sparse body of European administrators and police, unable to control

[24] Marc Côte, *L'Algérie ou l'espace retournée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988); *Pays, paysages, paysans d'Algérie* (Paris: CNRS, 1996).

[25] One classic instance of such geographic colonial dualism was Apartheid South Africa; see Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society* 1.4 (1972), 425–56); Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).

single-handed the native populations scattered through immense tracts of forest, desert, or mountainous terrain, governed through native intermediaries, often drawn from 'traditional' tribal élites or headmen.[26]

Part I is concerned primarily with the *commune mixte* system of indirect rule that remained largely in place throughout 1918 to 1958, the forty-year period of this study, that spanned the later Third Republic, the Vichy interregnum, and the Fourth Republic. It is at the level of the *commune mixte* that we can gain a close insight into rural governance at the grass roots and the micro-level day-to-day problems faced by the *caids* in managing what Martin Thomas has aptly designated the colonial 'intelligence state'.[27] It was a prime task of the *caid*, the eyes and ears of the colonial state in the interior, to maintain order in the mountains, to ensure the efficient registration of population and collection of taxes, and to report on, and physically repress, any signs of peasant unrest and the intrusion of revolutionary or nationalist agitators.

The affairs of the seventy-eight *communes mixtes* that spanned rural Algeria in which over 70 per cent of the indigenous population lived, was managed by the arabicist specialists of the department of Native Affairs (*Affaires indigènes*, later *Affaires algériennes*) that carefully vetted the appointment and careers of the *caids* and the rural élites (*grandes familles*) from whom they were recruited. The core policy or doctrine of the administrators of the Native Affairs was that the peasant masses could be best governed through the intermediary of 'traditional' chiefs, and locked into stable mountain reserves where they would be 'protected' from the dangerous currents of communism, trade unionism, and nationalism that swirled as a toxic force through the *bidonvilles* and towns of the plain. A limited degree of economic and social welfare improvement could take place, but this was to be gradual and cautious so as not to upset the equilibrium of a neo-tribal society, and any extension of citizenship rights was deferred into some indefinable future when 'primitive' natives would have eventually become educated and rational beings.

[26] Ronald Robertson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 117–42, notes that no European administration was able to dominate arcane, densely peopled civilizations, 'by simply projecting its main force upon them', but was compelled to govern via mediating native élites and forms of collaboration that inevitably involved coming to terms with the 'indigenous political economy'. There is an extensive literature on the problem faced by centralizing states in incorporating 'stateless' regions with strong traditions of communal autonomy. For a case study and bibliography, see Besnik Pula, 'Institutionalizing a Weak State: Law and Jurisdictional Conflict between Bureaucratic and Communal Institutions in the Albanian Highlands', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57.3 (2015), 637–64.

[27] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). The French and British empires, with limited powers of coercion, were dependent on the gathering of low-grade intelligence on everything from census registers, tax collection, and climate impacts, to water resources, cattle diseases, criminal statistics, and public opinion, in order to provide an early warning of security issues. See also C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

By the end of the First World War the CM system was well established, with its own specialized corps and 'traditions', and saw its mission as preserving a static and immobile peasantry. But, and this is what I am interested in, the next four decades witnessed a deepening crisis in the system that late colonialism was unable to resolve. The *grandes familles* that ruled the Chelif through patron-client relations entered a phase of crisis, faced economic ruin during the depression of the 1930s, suffered a loss in self-confidence, became internally divided, and responded to the growing electoral challenge of communism and separatism by moving towards populist forms of moderate nationalism. A major problem for the regime was that the very class of intermediaries on whom the 'intelligence state' depended became increasingly unreliable and even potential supporters of the anti-colonial cause, a kind of defection that was to carry major implications after 1954 as the Algiers government rapidly lost control of the mountainous interior in the face of advancing guerrilla bands and networks.

The crisis facing the CM system in the Chelif was symptomatic of a much wider and deepening contradiction that undermined the colonial state throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and endured through the War of Independence and long into the post-Independence era, a tension that also created deep, internal problems for the nationalist movement and the FLN. Essentially the European dominated urban economy of the plain was largely assimilated into a way of life and institutions that closely reflected and imitated those of metropolitan France, including municipal governance, party organizations, and electoral politics. However, literally alongside this a few kilometres beyond the official perimeter of colonization (Map 3, p. 59), existed a totally different social and political order in which thousands of impoverished peasants were ruled by a semi-feudal Algerian élite that maintained its power through patron-client relations.

Such dualism at the local or regional level reflected the contradictions of the central colonial state that after 1930 was divided into two opposed camps. On one side stood the conservative Native Affairs that, supported by powerful *colons* politicians, sought to retain settler supremacy through the long-established CM system and the *caids*, that would preserve or lock the peasant masses into the immobile, closed-off universe of the mountains. Opposition to this began to emerge during the 1930s among a group of technocratic reformers that was deeply alarmed at the critical demographic pressures building up in the interior and the threat of an impending 'Malthusian' crisis that would deepen famine conditions and fuel the revolutionary nationalism that was permeating isolated communities.[28] The reformist current, led by Lucien Paye, began to turn to an urgent, developmental programme of agricultural modernization to rescue the mass of rural poor, raise living standards in the interior, and cut the taproot of a

[28] The key marker of this emerging reformism was the radical book of the ex-Governor Maurice Violette, *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?: notes d'un ancien gouverneur général* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1931).

potential nationalist insurrection. Economic modernization was integrally linked to plans to politically assimilate the peasantry through a local government reform and to elect rural municipalities based on the traditional village *djemâa*, that would slowly but surely bring peasants into the Republic, extend full civic rights and equality, and eliminate the moribund *commune mixte* system of indirect rule.[29]

The tension between these two positions, the battle between 'tradition or modernity', continued, unresolved, throughout the period of this study. The long terminal crisis of French imperialism in Algeria did not involve, as is widely believed, a simple Manichaean confrontation between two blocks, revolutionary nationalism and colonial domination, but also a battle that reached into the heart of the central government in Algiers and internally divided the European establishment.

Algeria shared many of the features of the contradictory dualism of the colonial state identified by leading political scientists, anthropologists, and historians of sub-Saharan Africa. Mahmood Mamdani, for example, has argued that both British and French imperialism were internally divided between two doctrines, one that sought to ruthlessly destroy tribal leadership and to assimilate the 'native' into a modern, rights-based civil society, the other that through 'indirect rule' sustained tribal authority, often in a reinvented form, and that set out to enforce tradition through customary law.[30] As in Apartheid South Africa, argues Mamdani, the colonial state was 'organized differently in rural areas from urban ones, [and] that state was Janus-faced, bifurcated. It contained a duality: two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and rights, rural power of community and culture.'[31] In deploying dualism as a heuristic model for our interpretation of the Chelif region it is important to emphasize that the European-dominated plain and the peasant

[29] Algeria sits well with the broader analysis of Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 18–37, for sub-Saharan Africa. After the depression of 1929, Cooper shows, cracks began to appear in the imperial edifice of Britain and France as attempts to confine rural inhabitants in 'labour reserves' as a source of cheap labour were challenged, especially during and after the Second World War, by a growing political mobilization, militancy, trade unionism, and mass strikes. A loss of imperial self-confidence led governments to react in panic by swinging towards a reformist agenda, including economic developmentalism and attempts to extend forms of local government to colonial subjects.

[30] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and 'Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform', *Social Research* 66.3 (1999), 859–86.

[31] M. Mamdani, *Citizen*, 18. The Janus metaphor for the contradictions of the colonial system, which I also deploy later, has been used by numerous historians to characterize the tensions, the deep ambiguities, that could often be found at the heart of British and French imperialism. The traditional restriction of Africanist research to sub-Saharan Africa means that the Maghreb is usually excluded from the field of comparative scholarship, although there exists a rich potential here. Comparative anthropology, for example, tends to situate Algeria either in relation to the Maghreb and the Middle East or the Mediterranean world. The field of research on rural sub-Saharan Africa is vast, but two excellent reviews of the debate on peasants and rural crisis are Sara Berry, 'Debating the Land Question in Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44.4 (2002), 638–68; and Pauline E. Peters, 'Inequality and Social Conflict over Land in Africa', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4.3 (2004), 269–314.

economy of the mountains did not constitute two segregated, monolithic blocks but existed through a relational dynamic, a complex of economic, social, and political interactions that constantly undermined the attempt of *colons* politicians and administrators to sustain a form of apartheid.[32]

The ideological dualism of colonial Algeria, which reflected and also found concrete expression in the economic and political structures of the Chelif region, generated tensions within a number of disparate fields. It weakened and destabilized the *grandes familles* that politically dominated the countryside. Caught between defending their traditional patrimonial role as *caids* and the surge in populist nationalism, they tended to sit on the fence, to oscillate in an opportunist way between one side or the other, an instability that weakened the system of indirect rule. Such dualism could also be found in the tensions that divided the reformist modernizers, headed by Lucien Paye, from the entrenched conservative forces exemplified by Paul Schoen of the Native Affairs and by the governor Naegelen. The latter fatally blocked the reform agenda from 1948 to 1955 and gave the failing *caid* system a new lease of life precisely at the moment in time when Algeria was moving inexorably towards a terminal crisis and plans for an armed insurrection in the mountains were taking shape. The contradiction of traditionalism or modernity also found expression among the military during *Opération Pilote* when generals and COIN specialists were divided over whether to achieve 'pacification' of the peasantry by their assimilation into a 'New Algeria' through economic modernization, or whether to control the mountain zones through the old *caid* élites, neo-feudal intermediaries, warlords, and *harki* auxiliaries that continued the patron-client relations of the past.

Lastly, the anti-colonial Communist Party, the Messalist *Parti du peuple algérien* (PPA), and its break-away successor the FLN, were equally caught in the dilemma of whether to adopt the modernizing, secular, socialist, and Jacobin traditions of the French Republic, and to impose them on rural society, or whether to adopt, through direct contact with peasant society, the political and cultural traditions of the *djemâa*, popular Islam or 'maraboutism', and the conservative values of patriarchy, customary law, and the strict regulation of gender roles.[33] The period from 1942 to 1962, one of pre-insurrectionary nationalism and armed conflict, was marked by an unstable ebb and flow between the forces of traditionalism and modernity, a tension that was never resolved and continued to mark the post-Liberation Algerian Republic.

[32] On a relational approach to the history of rural Algeria, see Hannah-Louise Clark, 'Doctoring the *Bled*: Medical Auxiliaries and the Administration of Rural Life in Colonial Algeria, 1904–1954', Phd. thesis Princeton University (2014), 21–2.

[33] This tension lies at the core of Hugh Robert's chapter 8 in 'The FLN', an interpretation of the movement as one divided by an internal power struggle, exemplified by the 'Jacobin' leader Abane Ramdane, who was finally murdered by the Ben Bella faction that espoused a traditional, Islamo-Arab version of *djemâa* culture.

The complex interrelationship between these different strands, the multi-layered tensions at the heart of the colonial state, will be explored in more detail throughout the study.[34]

A further, closely associated or complimentary analytic approach has been developed by historians and political scientist, among them Mohammed Harbi and Mounira Charrad, who have further added to the understanding of the traditional structures of peasant society, and the system of indirect rule by 'tribal' élites, through the Weberian concept of patrimonialism. Harbi, who as a leading socialist in the FLN opposed the conservative religious currents of populist nationalism, has argued that the precolonial forms of patrimonialism of the Turkish state (*beylik*), were reconstituted in an amended form under French colonialism.[35] Patrimonial power in twentieth-century Algeria, a degraded form of tribalism, was exerted on the basis of ties of kinship and personal allegiance, patron-client relations that stood in contrast to the modern state in which a rational-bureaucratic order operated by written codes that regulated affairs according to impersonal rules and contract. As we will see, the powerful neo-feudal estate owners and their retainers in the Chelif region, shared many features of the Sicilian landed aristocracy and Spanish caciques that dominated the peasant masses through a system of personalized fealty, symbolized by reciprocity and the exchange of protection, employment, access to land, and other 'rewards', in return for labour, produce, and votes, a system that thinly disguised an asymmetrical form of exploitation and power that was backed up by violence.[36]

The political sociologist Mounira Charrad has developed the patrimonial model through a comparative study of state formation in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. While Tunisia, she argues, developed a modern bureaucracy and boldly contained the autonomous power of tribal kin-groupings so enabling a more liberal codification of women's rights, the Morocco monarchy did the opposite and extended conservative patrimonial structures. Algeria, faced with the contradictions of 'traditionalism or modernity' became 'stalled' between the two positions, caught in a 'paralyzing gridlock between reformist and conservative

[34] An outstanding work on the crisis of the late colonial state that analyses a similar dualism and set of contradictions is Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (Oxford: James Currey, 1990). Space does not allow a comparison here, but the Kenyan 'Mau Mau' revolt and its roots in settler society offers the closest similarities to Algeria and would be worthy of future investigation.

[35] Mohammed Harbi, *L'Algérie et son destin. Croyants ou citoyens?* (Algiers: Médias Associés, 1994).

[36] For an overview, see John Davis, *People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); and the brilliant study of Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860–1960: A Study of Violent Peasant Entrepreneurs* (Cambridge: Waveland Press, 1974).

tendencies'.[37] Charrad notes that colonial Algeria did not entirely destroy tribal society but retained kin-based groupings as a conservative, stabilizing element of social order; but in doing so Algerians united in political action as members of kin-based solidarities rather than as members of a class or along ideological lines. Charrad provides an important analysis in clearly identifying the joint family or agnatic kin-group as the fundamental building block of Algerian society, one that provided a blueprint for larger political organizations.

Part II investigates how anti-colonial movements, among them the Communist Party and the Messalist PPA,[38] began to penetrate from the urban centres into the surrounding countryside to challenge the CM system and *caids*. Following the Allied landings of November 1942 that rapidly eliminated the Vichy regime, populist nationalism spread with extraordinary speed and force into the interior and began to challenge the patron-client system, the key base of the intelligence state, which had remained hegemonic since the nineteenth century.[39] In Algeria, as in contemporary insurgencies in Latin America, a long period of stable patron-client politics suddenly gave way to a phase of rapid mobilization marked by the emergence of a new popular political culture based on a moral economy in which the poor began to lay claim to full rights as citizens and expressed outrage at the injustice of existing inequalities, fuelled by a sense of empowerment, of hope and dignity, and full entitlement to state provision of social welfare.[40]

The wave of peasant contestation was made possible through urban-based radicals effecting a juncture with, and harnessing the energy and resources of, the *djemâa*, the traditional, autonomous assemblies that governed small communities. In exploring the roots of peasant insurgency I pick up where the historian

[37] See Mounira M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); 'Central and Local Patrimonialism: State-Building in Kin-Based Societies', in Julia Adams and Mounira M. Charrad (eds), *Patrimonial Power in the Modern World*, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 636 (2011), 6–15, 49–68; and with Daniel Jaster, 'Limits of Empire: The French Colonial State and Local Patrimonialism in North Africa', in Mounira M. Charrad and Julia Adams (eds), *Patrimonial Capitalism and Empire*, Vol. 28: *Political Power and Social Theory* (2015), 1–5, 63–89. On clientele systems in the Middle East and North Africa, see also Jean Leca and Yves Schermeil, 'Clientélisme et patrimonalisme dans le monde arabe', *International Political Science Review* 4.4 (1983), 455–94.

[38] The PPA led by Messali Hadj, the successor of the *Étoile nord-Africaine* (ENA) founded in Paris in 1926, was frequently banned by the government, and from 1947 onwards ran in parallel with the *Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratique* (MTLD) that constituted the electoral, legal façade of the Messalist movement.

[39] The sociologist Howard Newby, *The Deferential Worker: A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 49–56, characterizes patron-client relations as inherently stable systems in which the ideological hegemony of rural élites was total, and perceived as 'natural' by subordinate land workers who inhabited a 'closed' world and were unable to 'comprehend any alternative system to the one they experienced, despite the antagonistic nature of class relationships'.

[40] See Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Susan C. Stokes, *Cultures in Conflict: Social Movements and the State in Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On a similar break-up of patron-client relations in the Philippines, see Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Mostefa Lacheraf had left off in 1965, and place a particular emphasis on the deep and largely hidden continuities in the traditions of self-governance by the rural community.[41] Lacheraf wrote that the long, courageous, and underground resistance of the peasantry to colonial domination constituted a tenacious, 'silent, poignant and reflective struggle', that adopted ingenious forms of obstruction and passive resistance that were centred on the recovery of lost lands and the defence of a traditional social and cultural order.[42] The capacity of isolated mountain peasants to engage in autonomous acts of resistance was based on the strength of 'communal solidarities', preserving a unity of purpose that had survived all the destructive processes of colonialism, and, in time, fed directly into the guerrilla movement, the 'decisive bedrock of the liberation of the country, even if the idea of revolution originated in the towns'.[43] Lacheraf remarked that since the isolated mountain societies had, far more than the urban centres and plain, escaped the worst impacts of direct colonization it had been able to preserve traditional forms of organization that served as a transmission belt for memories of tribal revolt. 'The long peasant resistance', he concluded, 'can be considered to be revolutionary', and he reflected on what amounted to a future research agenda for a history from below, one that was, however, soon to be stifled by an emergent, authoritarian state.[44]

Lacheraf, however, along with many historians, remained vague as to how peasant societies, subjected to such devastating processes of colonial destruction and dislocation, were able to maintain traditional forms of organization, a deep level of social, political, and cultural formation that served as a key vector of memory and identity, an eventual bedrock of resistance. During the nineteenth century French colonialism set out initially to destroy Algerian tribal society, to break up existing structures, as a first step in the assimilation of the population into a new European order. Despite this, historians have frequently continued to use the term 'tribe' in a vague and ill-defined way in relation to the first half of the twentieth century when it no longer had any meaningful presence in the Tell. This has tended to obfuscate the fact that the key building blocks of Algerian rural society lay at a sub-tribal level, that of the joint family household (*ayla*) and its social and political expression in the small community of the fraction and its

[41] Mostefa Lacheraf had an unparalleled knowledge of Algerian popular culture and history: see his autobiographical *Des noms et des lieux: mémoires d'une Algérie oubliée* (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 1998); Omar Lardjane (ed.), *Mostefa Lacheraf. Une oeuvre, un itinéraire, une référence* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2006); and Fanny Colonna, 'The Nation's "Unknowing Other": Three Intellectuals and the Culture(s) of Being Algerian, or the Impossibility of Subaltern Studies in Algeria', *Journal of North African Studies* 8.1 (2003), 155–70.

[42] Mostefa Lacheraf, *L'Algérie: nation et société* (Paris: Francis Maspero, [1st edn 1965] 1976), 14. This is a collection of essays published between 1954 and 1964.

[43] M. Lacheraf, *L'Algérie*, 24.

[44] M. Lacheraf, *L'Algérie*, 33, 'One day the history of this revolution will be written, not from the top, but . . . at the grassroots, at the level at which the decisive action assumed the greatest volume and made most sense'.

assembly, the *djemâa*. The autonomous, patriarchal families, which inhabited farmhouses widely dispersed throughout the mountainous interior, provided the core cell of the commune and the *djemâa* with which the anti-colonial movements made contact from the 1930s. Through this the nationalists found a bridgehead into the isolated mountains and were able to build a joint movement that offered resistance to the *caids* and administrators of the *commune mixte*.

As we show in detail in Chapter 6, it would be a mistake to view the *djemâa* as an ancient and unchanging institution. Since one of its prime functions was to organize the defence of the community when threatened by an external agency, whether other *douars*, settlers, or the state, it had a dynamic and adaptive capacity. The transformations of the *djemâa* between 1900 and 1954 were complex, but one crucial change was brought about by the 'Jonnart Law' of 1919 that created alongside the small informal village assembly of the fraction the official, larger *douar-djemâa* made up of representatives elected from a grouping of fractions. The *djemâa* elections, which operated according to a system of party lists, had a dramatic, long-term impact by opening the isolated peasant society to national politics and anti-colonial movements. The conditions emerged that would after 1954 fuel a civil war since each *douar* tended to crystallize out into two warring factions, the conservative, pro-French forces that were rallied by the *caids* and their clientele network, and the oppositional party list headed by the president of the elected *djemâa*. The political map at the local level in the Chelif consisted of a complex, and unstable, mosaic in which small communities of loyalists existed alongside militant, anti-French fractions, each block cemented together by ties of kinship and shared economic and religious interests.

Understanding such rural politics has been impeded by historians and other commentators on modern Algeria who have tended to analyse late colonial politics through the distorting lens of a Eurocentric, or specifically French Jacobin and Republican, tradition of state formation and electoral politics. But in recent decades political anthropologists and social scientists have argued that non-European societies in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere cannot be understood through such a hegemonic framework.[45] This issue is particularly difficult and hard to untangle in the Algerian case because of the dualism of social, economic, and political space in which urban-based colonial and nationalist leaders, as well as later historians, shared a classic Eurocentric model of political change and imposed this discourse in analysing rural populations that were embedded in a quite different logic. As electoral politics expanded among the peasants of the Chelif region they appeared to be conforming, no matter how

[45] This is a vast and complex debate that I cannot do justice to hear, but for the thesis that a European model of state development and party politics, which has dominated the work of Africanists, needs to be cast aside, see Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

isolated and illiterate, to the standard norms and behaviour patterns of metropolitan French voters backing political parties and their ideologies. But in going to the ballot box peasants were, in many instances, not casting votes for a party programme but for local 'big men' to whom they were bound by patron-client relations. In other words peasants appeared to observers to be conforming to French norms or forms of behaviour, whereas this acted as a screen to conceal or obscure quite different intentions.[46]

In the Chelif during the decade from 1944 to 1954 the urban-based Communist and Messalist parties began to establish direct contact with the peasants massed in the mountains, often located within walking distance of the towns. In particular, after the abrupt halt by the Algiers government to a reformist agenda in 1948, the nationalists turned to the clandestine preparation of an armed revolt, a partisan war that would be based among the mountain peasants of the Dahra and Ouarsenis. This gave a new urgency to the task of winning over isolated peasant communities to the nationalist cause and preparing for a future guerrilla war through establishing networks that could transmit propaganda, supplies, weapons, and personnel between the urban centres and surrounding countryside.

The comparative history of partisan or guerrilla warfare suggests that the first steps that were taken by a vanguard of revolutionaries, often town dwellers that had little experience of rural life, to establish a strategic base in isolated zones of forest and mountain were the most perilous since small and often poorly equipped bands suddenly faced the reality of survival in a harsh, unknown, and unforgiving environment.[47] It often proved essential, if such risky ventures were to succeed, to prepare well in advance, and to secure the support of indigenous people who otherwise were hostile to all intruders and could decimate the small bands or inform the incumbent military of their whereabouts. A strong alliance with peasants could, on the other hand, provide essential support in a difficult environment, advice as to the most secure base locations, guides and trackers, food and shelter, and intelligence.

Urban-based militants on penetrating into the mountains faced the difficult task of shaping propaganda and organizations that through an 'informal ethnology' would not alienate conservative peasants that were deeply attached to popular forms of religion, the 'marabout' belief in the magical powers of the saints, customary law, and rigid patriarchal gender roles. Part III of *War in the Mountains* explores the way in which as the communist and nationalist

[46] A similar pattern could be found almost a century earlier in rural France where the bitter bi-polarization of village factions, formulated in the language of national politics and ideology, camouflaged clientelist struggles for local power: see François Ploux, 'Luttes de factions à la Campagne. L'exemple du Lot au XIXe siècle', *Histoire et sociétés rurales* 22.2 (2004), 103–34.

[47] The parlous state of Castro's guerrilla force on arriving by small boat, the *Granma*, in the Sierra Maestra in December 1956 provides a case in point; see Ernesto Che Guevara, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 9–13.

movements extended a logistic base into the interior, including peasant cells, they faced the crucial test of implanting the first guerrilla bands. The renowned, but short-lived 'Red Maquis' of the Communist Party in the Ouarsenis, which was decimated by the army within a matter of weeks, provided an object lesson in the fatal consequences of not preparing an adequate peasant base in advance. A close examination of the little known 'Zitoufi Maquis' shows the difficult task faced at the micro-level in constructing a support base in a small peasant community that was internally divided over the question of the liberation struggle.

The armed forces of the FLN in the Chelif region, the *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN), like the communists, faced considerable difficulties in establishing an early guerrilla force, but contact with the mountain peasants during the previous decade stood it in better stead in terms of creating a logistics network that supplied foodstuffs, arms, and other materials through the long-established commercial links of itinerant traders, grocers, café owners, livestock dealers, bus drivers, and transport companies that plied between the towns and countryside. But most crucial of all was the successful ALN adaptation of the pre-existing *djemâa* organization in setting up new revolutionary cells. Contrary to the widely accepted historical narrative, the guerrillas did not set out to terrorize and destroy all the agents of the colonial state, the *caids*, headmen, and field guards of the *commune mixte*, but attempted, as far as possible, to take over the personnel and administrative functions of those in the local government that were willing to co-operate. Small numbers of poorly equipped guerrillas, faced with tens of thousands of peasants, were simply unable to develop from scratch their own system of government and in effect they integrated numerous fraction headmen who had a long experience of keeping civil registers and collecting taxes, and had a close knowledge and intelligence of each family, their resources, shotguns, and political affiliations.

The creation of a quite sophisticated counter-state by the FLN in the Chelif, one that could provide a parallel system of governance to the colonial state, including civil registration, tax collection, schooling, medical centres, justice, pensions, and family allowances, provides an example of the kind of 'rebel governance' that has been recently theorized through a comparative model of insurrectionary movements from Latin America and Asia to Africa and the Middle East.[48] Many of the young, educated men that emerged as guerrilla leaders in the Chelif region had fathers that worked, or themselves worked, with the local administration in the town halls, sub-prefectures, and *communes mixtes* and had a good working knowledge of the existing system of rural government that they rapidly converted to their own ends.

[48] Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017).

By late 1956 French counterinsurgent specialists were fully aware, from a multitude of captured documents, of the FLN *Organisation politico-administrative* (OPA) that had spread so rapidly throughout the mountainous interior. At this crucial juncture, as the French military faced the very real possibility of defeat, psychological warfare officers that had returned from Indochina after Dien Bien Phu studied the reasons for the catastrophic defeat at the hands of a 'peasant army' in Vietnam. The military, under General Salan, adopted the doctrine of revolutionary warfare, the idea that guerrillas could not be defeated by conventional, mechanized forces, but only by population-centric strategies that could win the battle for hearts and minds. In January 1957, just as the 'Battle of Algiers' raged in the capital, Salan and Lacoste backed the plan of the young ethnologist Jean Servier, a specialist on the mountain Berbers, to mount *Opération Pilote* in the Chelif region.

Part IV investigates how Servier, backed by Colonel Goussault head of the Psychological Warfare 5th Bureau, set about the task of implementing a major experiment in counterinsurgency informed by a sociological and anthropological knowledge of the political and socio-cultural structures of the Dahra and Ouarsenis peasants. Servier and his backers believed that a sophisticated ethnology and intelligence could rapidly outmanoeuvre and defeat the ALN at its own game and enable 'pacification' of the mountain zones though the insertion of a *djemâa* organization that replicated the structures of the ALN by creating a basic self-governing commune, auto-defense units, and a developmental programme of schools, medical centres, and housing. By July 1957 *Pilote* was acclaimed a resounding success, a showcase for military attachés from around the world, and was extended throughout Algeria, but a close investigation of the archives reveals how and why in reality an anthropological-based, hearts and minds strategy failed.

Deep tensions appeared between senior commanders who, wedded to conventional military strategies, were hostile to psychological warfare, and likewise between the generals and the prefectoral administration. In practice it proved almost impossible to train officers in the methods of anthropology developed by Servier, a training that would have required years of specialized instruction in Arabic or Berber languages and ethnology. Anthropology did not constitute a 'tranferable skill' and this may explain why the army reverted to crude techniques of behaviourist brainwashing to gain compliance from the peasantry. In addition the military were unable to escape the contradictions that had long beset colonial governance before 1954, the tension between traditional patrimonialism and the developmental modernity of a 'New Algeria'. In the Chelif they turned to support a 'third force' strategy based on the neo-tribalism of the *bachaga* Boualam and the warlord 'Kobus', as well as the superstitious practices of conservative maraboutism.

The greatest problems, however, derived from an initial decision to carry out the *Pilote* experiment in an area of dispersed population, an issue that had exercised colonial government since the 1840s. Commanders, frustrated by their inability to rapidly 'pacify' thinly spread mountain populations, undermined the *Pilote* hearts and minds strategy by creating free-fire *zones interdites* in which the inhabitants were subjected to the conventional 'big division' methods of mechanized warfare, bombing and artillery barrages, and the mass displacement (*regroupements*) of peasants from their burned-out farmhouses into military camps. Anthropology-led COIN operations, which claimed to be sensitive to the culture, values, and way of life of mountain peasants, proved to be fleeting and shallow, and the slow work of building up contact and trust through a hearts and minds approach was repeatedly destroyed by repressive operations.

Part IV concludes by re-examining the Bourdieu thesis, so widely shared by historians, that the peasantry was an essentially powerless class, a victim of large-scale military violence and *déracinement* that definitively shattered the traditional rural society. While the scale of the rupture that uprooted and transferred over half of the Dahra and Ouarsenis population into camps and shanty towns was undeniable, the peasantry responded to the crisis confronting them by recourse to fraction leaders and the *djemâa*, which had historically played the key role in maintaining unity and community cohesion in the face of any serious external threat. In many instances *douar* inhabitants did not passively await expulsion from their farmhouses but, through the *djemâa*, actively set out to negotiate their mass 'surrender' to the French through the ritual ceremonies of the *aman*. Such surrenders were often carried out through secret agreement with the FLN in order to create safe-havens for the guerrilla forces. Even in the refugee camps resistance continued, grounded in traditional forms of family, kin, and *djemâa* organization. The forms of family and fraction solidarity that had provided the base of community defence and resistance since the nineteenth century survived, despite massive violence and disruption, outlasted the war, and continued to shape the political order of the future, post-Independence state.

PART I

THE DUALISM OF THE COLONIAL STATE

Indirect Rule and the Crisis of the commune mixte *System*

1
Separate Worlds?
European Domination of the Chelif Plain

How French colonialism brought about the remarkable geographical dualism of the Chelif region, with settler domination of the rich agricultural plain while a dense population of impoverished agro-pastoralists was cooped up in the mountainous interior, came about through a long and complex process of conquest, occupation, and colonial state building.[1] The history of this construction of economic, social, and political space is in part well known for the Chelif plain since Xavier Yacono, who worked for many years as a teacher in Orleansville, wrote an exhaustive doctoral thesis that was focused specifically on the historical geography of European settlement.[2] This is why this book, which is focused on the much less well-known mountain zone, gives less space to the urbanized plain occupied by European latifundia. However, we start first in this chapter with a background discussion of the settler zone since, as we will see, the dynamics of peasant society, and how it eventually turned towards armed insurrection, can only be understand as one of a deep interrelationship between the mountains and the urban centres.[3] The following Chapter 2 then turns to the general features of economy and society in the Dahra and Ouasenis mountains.

[1] The outer boundary of our area of study, which I refer to for convenience as the Chelif region, corresponds to the area of the *arrondissements* of Orleansville and Miliana, each administered by a sub-prefect until they were merged by decree on 28 June 1956 into the department of Orleansville. Covering an area of 12,200 square kilometres, twice the size of a large English county, this zone included the mountain block of the Dahra-Zaccar rising to a thousand metres between the Mediterranean and the Chelif River, and to the south the massif of the Ouarsenis, reaching as far as the Sersou region on the northern fringes of the Sahara.

[2] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2 vols. This 'Annales'-style thesis remains today perhaps the finest regional studies of Algerian settler colonialism. Yacono who carried out his research while teaching in Orleansville from 1934 to about 1950, had a close, direct knowledge of the field of study. He later followed a university career in Algiers and in Toulouse where from 1962 to 1977 he held the chair in the history of colonialism.

[3] The anthropologist Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, argued that peasant societies could only be defined through their historic tributary relationship to urban civilization.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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French Settler Domination of the Chelif Plain

After the French invaded Algeria in 1830, they engaged in a 'scorched earth' strategy that was exceptionally violent in the Chelif region.[4] With the 'pacification' of the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains, that ended with the defeat of the great millenarian revolt of Bou Maza in 1845, the first French settlers in the Chelif began to displace the indigenous agro-pastoralists, many of whom were driven into the surrounding hills. By 1848 the French government was committed to a policy of official colonization, of state-assisted European settlement that would lay the foundations of a new economic and social order. Between 1843 and 1888 some twenty urban centres were created along the axis of the Chelif valley, an expansion that was boosted by the arrival of a railway line in the 1860s (see Map 2, p. 5).

The indigenous society in the plain, in contrast to that of the mountains, not only lost almost all its richest arable lands, but its tribal structures were systematically dismantled so that the population was reduced to a landless proletariat that was torn loose from the moorings of traditional culture and community. In 1882 the administrator and sociologist Emile Masqueray gave a stark, eyewitness account of the poverty of the dispossessed peasantry:

> In the valley of the Chelif, as in most of the Kabyle valleys, the richest soil in the low-lying areas belongs to *colons*, moneylenders, and the few natives who can still fight for their property and way of life; the forests above, that cover half of the mountains, belong to the state. In between survive the most miserable of beings. Their fields strewn with rocks, spiny jujube bushes, and round lentisk with tough roots, support a few, half-empty husks; their orchards consist of a mass of cactus, their habitation of huts made with branches, like upturned boats, less well constructed than those of the negroes. When a traveller approaches, vicious dogs hurl themselves forward with bared fangs; children and women in rags disappear like lizards; the men lying on the ground slowly raise themselves, yellow with fever, humble and distrustful.[5]

[4] On the savage war of conquest in the Chelif, see Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, Vol. 1: *La conquête et la colonisation* (Paris: PUF, 1964), 315–23; Maréchal de Saint-Arnaud, *Lettres du Maréchal de Saint-Arnaud, 1832–1854* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1858), 2 vols; François Maspero, *L'honneur de Saint-Arnaud* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2004); M. Lacheraf, *L'Algérie*, ch. 3; William Gallois, 'Dahra and the History of Violence in Early Colonial Algeria', in Martin Thomas (ed.), *The French Colonial Mind*, Vol. 2: *Violence, Military Encounters and Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011) 3–25; on the infamous asphyxiation by smoke (*enfumades*) of hundreds of villagers that sought protection in caves, see Raoul Busquet, 'L'affaire des grottes du Dahra (19–20 juin 1845)', *Revue africaine* 51 (1907), 116–68; Benali Boukort, *Enfumades. Mazouna résiste dans la nuit coloniale* (Paris: Alfabarre, 2014).

[5] Masqueray, *Journal des Débats*, 26 August 1882, quoted in X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.349. Masqueray uses the word 'Kabyles' here as a general term for all mountain people in the Tell. Masqueray recounts his train journey into the summer furnace of the Chelif in *Souvenirs et visions d'Afrique* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1894), 291–310.

How this dispossession and dislocation or *déracinement* came about in the Chelif region during the nineteenth century is complex, but quite well known to historians. The tribal agro-pastoral society of the plains was, between 1830 and the 1880s subjected to a sequence of shattering blows, beginning with the seizure of Turkish state (*beylik*) lands and the dislocation of the politically powerful tribes like the Ouled Kosseir that were forced by resettlement (*cantonnement*) into a much reduced area of poor soils.[6] The weakened tribes were further decimated by the famine of 1867–8, the worst in modern Algerian history, during which an estimated 820,000 people died.[7] The worst-affected area was in the plain and piedmont of the central Chelif valley in which several tribes lost over 60 per cent of their population.[8]

Urban speculators seized the opportunity of the demographic crisis to launch a second phase of land appropriation that was initiated by the *sénatus-consulte* laws of 22 April 1863 and 26 July 1873 (the 'Warnier act'). This complex legislation, a formidable 'machine de guerre', achieved the 'Europeanization' of customary land law that led to the radical disintegration of Algerian collective property rights and the entire socio-economic system that underpinned it.[9] The creation of the Orleansville land registry in 1880 was linked to an unprecedented wave of land speculation in the Chelif plain as witnessed by the land agent Charles Pourcher and the Orleansville lawyer Louis Boyer-Banse.[10] The latter described how

[6] Xavier Yacono's study of the Ouled Kosseir provides the most detailed investigation by a historian of the long-term dislocation of a tribe, and its reduction to the level of a landless proletariat. See X. Yacono, *Bureaux arabes et l'évolution des genres de vie indigènes dans l'Ouest du Tell algérois (Dahra, Chélif, Ouarsenis, Sersou)* (Paris: Larose, 1953), 173–95, and *Colonisation*, 1.285–7 and 2.117–18.

[7] Djilali Sari, *Le desastre démographique* (Algiers: SNED, 1982); Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Le royaume Arabe: la politique algérienne de Napoléon III, 1860–1870* (Alger: SNED, 1977), 'Le désastre du monde indigène', 443–547; Kamel Kateb, *Européens, 'Indigènes' et Juifs en Algérie (1830–1962). Représentations et réalités des populations* (Paris: INED, 2001); Bertrand Taithe, 'La famine de 1866–1868: anatomie d'une catastrophe et construction médiatique d'un événement', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 41.2 (2010), 113–27.

[8] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Royaume Arabe*, 465.

[9] There exists a considerable body of research on the *sénatus*, but for a recent revision, see Didier Guignard, 'Conservatoire ou révolutionnaire? Le sénatus-consulte de 1863 appliqué au régime foncier d'Algérie', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 41.2 (2010), 81–95; on the implementation of the 1863 *sénatus* in the province of Algiers, which included the Chelif region, see Alain Sainte-Marie, 'La province d'Alger vers 1870: l'établissement du douar-commune et la fixation de la nature de la propriété en territoire militaire dans le cadre du sénatus consulte du 22 Avril 1863', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 9 (1971), 37–61, which is based on his masters thesis, 'L'application du Senatus-Consulte du 22 avril 1863 dans la province d'Alger (1863–1870)', University of Nice, 1969.

[10] Charles Pourcher, *Souvenirs et impressions recueillies au cours d'une période d'action coloniale de 55 ans (1867–1922)* (Paris: R. Chibère, 1924); and Louis Boyer-Banse, *La propriété indigène dans l'arrondissement d'Orléansville, essai de monographie économique algérienne* (Orleansville: M. Charbonnel, 1902). On the land registers, a key source for the social history of rural Algeria, see Didier Guignard, 'Les archives vivantes des conservations foncières en Algérie', *L'année du Maghreb* 13 (2015), 79–108. Djilali Sari, who described the '3,000 gros volumes poussiéreux' of the Orleansville land registry, was the first historian to make use of this type of source in his research into land-holding in the Ouarsenis, 'Le démantèlement de la propriété foncière', *Revue historique* 249 (1973), 48.

between 1881 and 1891 twelve thousand Algerians, crippled by legal fees, had been forced to sell 14,000 hectares at a derisory low price.[11] By the end of the First World War European settlers had largely completed the process of monopolizing the rich and irrigated land in the Chelif plain (Map 2, p. 5).

Under the process of official colonization, the government chose sites for new townships, acquired the necessary land, planned and built a basic infrastructure of roads, house plots, water supply, school, church, and town hall, and recruited ex-soldiers and convoys of settlers from metropolitan France. Between 1843 and 1906 some twenty-two agro-towns were founded along the length of the mid-Chelif plain, from Charon and Malakoff in the west to Oued Fodda, Les Attafs, Duperré, Affreville, and Lavigerie in the east, most of them served by a railway station, goods yard, and grain silos.[12] Each of these centres constituted a *commune de plein exercice* (CPE), a *colons*-dominated municipality, that ensured that taxes were spent predominantly on the social and economic infrastructures of the township, such as water supply, sewage, electrification, post offices, schools, police stations, medical centres and markets that advantaged settlers over the Algerian labourers that inhabited squalid shanty towns on peripheral wastelands. Orleansville, the jewel in the crown of the colonial Chelif and administrative capital, founded by the military in 1843, was constructed behind high defensive walls, in the standard grid layout of the frontier town, and by 1954 had expanded to a thriving, modern city of 24,000 inhabitants that, with its sub-prefecture, hospital, lycée, hotels, cinemas, post office, monuments, public gardens, indoor market, café-restaurants, and railway station, had the superficial appearance of a small departmental capital in the south of France.[13]

The growth of the European urban population was linked to a process by which many of the small pioneer *colons*, faced with the harsh and insecure conditions of life on isolated farms and unable to weather years of drought or economic depression as during the 1890s and 1930s, abandoned farming for the more comfortable life of the towns and employment as railway workers, lorry and taxi drivers, electricians, blacksmiths, plumbers, shopkeepers, waiters, postmen, and hairdressers.[14] The agrarian economy of the Chelif plain was marked by a process of concentration in which both Algerian peasants and small *colons* lost their lands to big estate owners that had access to capital, and invested in mechanization, irrigation, and the most advanced forms of production, from aerial crop-spraying

[11] L. Boyer-Banse, *La propriété indigène*, 75–6.

[12] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 1.340–87, 2.70–111, 127–50, 245–63, has much detail on the townships (*centres*) including street plans.

[13] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.70–81, 254–7.

[14] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.246, table 18, statistics of European employment in sixteen towns of the Chelif.

to experimentation with high yield strains of cereals and livestock.[15] They diversified into new export crops such as cotton, citrus fruit, sugar beet, and tobacco, which were processed in local factories, canneries, flour mills, and abattoirs, and dispatched to Europe in refrigerated waggons.

The deepening disparities in wealth in the Chelif after the 1930s derived not only from the concentration of the most fertile land in the hands of a *colons* and Algerian élite, like the Bouthiba and Saiah families, but equally from a monopolization of water resources. The Chelif valley suffered from a notorious rain-shadow effect, so that precipitation was both very low and unreliable, and at an average of 400 millimetres per annum was at the limit of viable grain production. Through irrigation the estate owners in the plain were able, after the 1930s, to escape the catastrophic impacts of regular, but unpredictable, droughts, unlike the tens of thousands of peasants in the mountains who relied on rainfall and faced periodic famine or bankruptcy.[16] Wealthy European and Algerian owners prospered from the windfall of the huge Steeg and Ghribs Dams and irrigation projects that, while built at public expense, increased their land values up to ten times.[17] On the eve of the 1954 revolt some 1,400 landowners in the Chelif owned an average of 118 hectares, and occupied 90 per cent of the richest arable land, and held 90 per cent of modern equipment, such as tractors and combine harvesters.[18]

The dramatic rise of popular nationalism in the Chelif after 1943, that was in part linked to a food crisis among the proletariat, can be placed within the context of this profoundly unequal society. Local politics in the 1940s was dominated by a colonial élite that was constituted not only of wealthy farmers that ran their extensive estates through professional managers, but also by a class of urban-based rentiers, millers, bankers, insurers, lawyers, and surveyors, who engaged in land speculation and investment and whose economic interests were tied directly, or indirectly, to agro-business and exports.[19] Orleansville electoral politics was dominated by a European élite and petites bourgeoisie that defended its economic

[15] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.260–1, has data on how the process of concentration continued to deepen after the First World War, such that the percentage of private land in the hands of Europeans in the Chelif CPE increased from 44 per cent in 1917 to 56 per cent in 1951.

[16] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.211–17, during the catastrophic drought of 1945 *colons* achieved good yields of 15 to 25 quintals per hectare in irrigated zones, as opposed to the zero return of the famished peasants in the 'dry' lands.

[17] AOM 9140/175, 1955 statistics of landownership in the irrigated zone, indicate that 258 Europeans owned 10,478 hectares and 490 Algerians 3,080 hectares, an average difference of 40.6 hectares per owner to 6.29 hectares. On the capital cost of the Steeg and Ghribs projects, see Louis Chevalier, *Le problème demographique Nord-Africain*. INED. Travaux et documents cahier 6 (Paris: PUF, 1947), 98–9.

[18] AOM 9/40/47, notes sur le département [Orleansville], November 1961, 2–4; see also X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.240, table 16. For photographs of teams of Algerian labourers, under *colons* supervisors, operating advanced machinery or picking crops in the Chelif and Mitidja plains, see X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, vol. 2, pll. 5, 6, and 7; and Pierre Bourdieu, *Images d'Algérie. Une affinité élective* (Actes Sud, 2003), 35, 141.

[19] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.261, only 3,000 Europeans in the entire Chelif region worked the land directly and many owners or rentiers lived in the towns and ran their estates through managers.

interests through the town council, representation on the departmental *Conseil général*, in the colonial parliament (*Délégations financières*), and through various associations like the powerful Federation of Algerian Mayors.[20]

The relationship of the urban political élite to the surrounding farming region, and to the peasant question, can be illustrated by the example of the patrician Robert family, which had first arrived in Orleansville in 1849 and established a flour mill on the Chelif River.[21] Joseph Robert, who succeeded his brother as mayor of Orleansville from 1919 to 1929, assumed a prominent role in national politics through election as a *délégué financier* (1913–45), and to the *Conseil supérieur*, of which he was twice president. Joseph Robert was a key player in the inter-war *colons* party machine, headed by Gabriel Abbo, that blocked attempts to improve the political, social, and economic position of the Algerian population, in particular through the '*Blum-Violette*' project.

Robert, an expert on grain production, marketing, and pricing, was a key spokesman at both the local and national level for the farmers, millers, bakers, pasta manufacturers, and exporters that controlled the grain trade. Joseph Robert maintained his electoral base in the Chelif through protecting the interest of the *colons* through loans provided by his private bank and the *Caisses de crédit Agricole*, of which he was the president.[22] During the great depression of the 1930s Robert worked to save smaller European farmers from bankruptcy by supporting the creation of the interventionist *Office de blé*. Robert was also a leading advocate of the great dam construction programme in the Chelif that was agreed by the colonial government in 1920. Before the completion of the Steeg Dam in 1934 the government began to investigate the future impacts of irrigation and Robert was sent on a mission to California in 1932 to tour orchards, fruit-packing plant, cooperatives, and canning factories.[23] The Orleansville press and politicians developed the image of the Chelif region as France's 'California', the American state that in the 1930s had a mythical status as an agricultural Eldorado,

[20] Jacques Bouveresse, *Un parlement colonial? Les délégations financières algériennes 1898–1945*, 2 vols (Mont-Saint-Aignan: University of Rouen and Le Havre, 2008, 2010), provides the most detailed analysis of the stranglehold of the agricultural interest over colonial politics.

[21] See the memoirs of the famed lexicographer and creator of the 'Petit Robert' Paul Robert, *Au fil des ans et des mots. Les semailles* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1979), 1.29–33; also the conference proceedings, Paul Robert, *Mémoire, dictionnaires et enseignements. Acte du colloque, Chlef, 17, 18 et 19 novembre 2010* (Algiers: HIBR Editions, 2011).

[22] J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.411; X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.201. Ferhat Abbas, *La nuit coloniale. Guerre et révolution d'Algérie* (Paris: Julliard, 1962), 112, notes that in 1953 the caisses agricoles advanced forty-two thousand million francs to 21,000 *colons*, but only two thousand millions to a million peasants. On average each European received a thousand times more in capital loans than the Algerian farmer.

[23] P. Robert, *Les semailles*, 150–2. Paul Robert, who trained as an agronomist, accompanied his father. X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 1.57, the findings were published as *Mission algérienne et commerciale aux Etats-Unis (mai-juin 1932)*, *Gouvernement générale*.

the land of super-modernity, and giant dam and hydroelectric projects.[24] The social, economic, and political divide between the Eldorado of the Robert family, which lived, attended by servants, in a fine mansion in central Orleansville, and the Algerian landless proletariat that inhabited the squalid *bidonvilles* on the edge of the town could not have been greater.[25]

The town dwellers of the Chelif, both Europeans and a class of conservative Algerian shopkeepers and traders, held a contradictory stereotype of mountain peasants as gentle primitives, loyal to France and their masters, or of dangerous fanatics prone to unpredictable and bloody rebellion. The national park of the Ouarsenis, which figured large in tourist guidebooks, was a place of recreation for the inhabitants of Orleansville seeking relief from the furnace heat of the plain in thermal spas, holiday camps, or hunting lodges. But alongside this existed what Daniel Lefeuvre has called the 'anguish of submersion' that fed off memories of events like that of the revolt of 1901 at Margueritte in the eastern Chelif, a permanent psychosis that 'fanatical' primitives could, at any moment, erupt as an elemental force and overrun farms and villages.[26] In Molière and Teniet el Haad Europeans reacted to the Sétif crisis of May 1945 by fleeing in panic to the civil defence bunkers that had been planned for such a contingency. Jacques Torres recounts how as a boy in Orleansville in the early 1950s, during cinema performances, turbulent Algerian youths, commonly known as 'mountain Arabs', would erupt into applause during Westerns whenever Red Indians defeated the cowboys.[27] Peasants were highly visible to the townspeople on a daily basis as they descended into the centres on market day, but often this was with a note of apprehension, as recounted in the memoirs of Sadek Hadjeres.[28] To this could be added the racist assumption, shared by Algerian notables who laid claim to a superior Muslim and Arab descent, that the mountain Berbers constituted a primitive and pagan people.

Another commonly held perception, shared by some Chelif administrators, was that mountain peasants remained isolated from western civilization trapped in an archaic way of life that had barely changed over two thousand years. This was a

[24] On the similar myth in Morocco, see Will D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages: Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions, 1912–1986* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1988), ch. 3, 'The California Dream'.

[25] P. Robert, *Les semailles*, 72, as a young boy Robert describes, during the famine of 1920, driving at night with his father, when the headlights illuminated the corpse of an Algerian who had starved to death. His father left the body on the roadside.

[26] See Daniel Lefeuvre, *Chère Algérie. La France et sa colonie, 1930–1962* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), 73–5.

[27] Jacques Torres, *L'Orléansvillois: un essai sur l'histoire du département du Chélif* (private publication, ND).

[28] The communist leader Sadek Hadjerès, *Quand une nation s'éveille. Mémoires*, Vol. 1: *1928–1949* (Algiers: INAS 2014), 51, notes how in Berrouaghia, to the east of the Chelif, peasants speaking a strong dialect came to market where the field-guards confiscated their staffs and they sat in the Arab cafés on alfa matting, listening to grammar-phones playing Arab laments; P. Robert, *Les semailles*, 193, describes how as a boy he was scared of the wild-looking mountain peasants ('*d'aspect sauvage*') who came to his grandfather's mill.

misleading, and potentially dangerous view, since it tended to underestimate the extent to which the peasants maintained multiple linkages to the urban centres through networks that would in time provide the pathway for radical nationalist ideas as well as the two-way exchange of personnel, materials, money, and arms between the towns and maquis. Peasants who lived in the piedmont, the rich intermediate agricultural zone that occupied the hilly flanks of the Chelif plain, travelled daily on foot and cycle to work as agricultural labourers or in the townships, while those living in the isolated high mountains descended each year at harvest time as seasonal workers. The rapid increase in population after the 1930s led to a deepening cycle of poverty in the mountains as peasants further sub-divided tiny farms and, facing a state of almost permanent malnutrition, thousands of families moved permanently down to the plain where they could find waged labour and accommodation in self-built *gourbis* or shacks made of debris on marginal wastelands, along riverbeds, and on the margins of the townships.

Orleansville, with its two large suburbs of La Ferme and Bocca Sahnoun, illustrates this evolution. La Ferme, founded as a village settlement in 1848 on the right bank of the Chelif River, received a wave of migrants from the *douars* of the northern piedmont, especially Medjadja and Beni Rached.[29] By 1954 the European population of 383 was outnumbered by 6,945 Algerians.[30] Even more explosive in its growth was Bocca Sahnoune, the biggest shanty town in the region that sprang up during the 1930s on the southern margins of Orleansville, that lacked any urban infrastructure such as piped water and sewerage. By 1954 the fifty-seven Europeans who lived there were massively outnumbered by 8,462 Algerians.[31] Bocca Sahnoune, beyond the railway tracks, was a receptor zone for uprooted peasants that migrated from the *douars* of the Ouarsenis piedmont to the south, mainly Tsighaout, Guerboussa and Temdrara that were within one or two hours walking distance.[32] Of the 4,721 Europeans in Orleansville, 4,282 or 90.7 per cent inhabited the central administrative and business area of the old town spatially segregated from the impoverished Algerian masses located in the *bidonvilles* on the urban fringe.

[29] There were about 113 *douars* within the Chelif region: their location can be found on Map 4, p. 189.

[30] Djilali Sari, '*L'evolution d'un habitat sous-integré. La bocca Sahnoun* (*El Asnam*)', conference on the Geography of the Maghreb, Rabat, 3–13 September 1973, 4, available online at the Centre National de Documentation, Haut Commissariat du Plan, Royaume de Maroc, <http://www.abhato.net.ma>.

[31] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.256, 342, for a plan of the town and photographs of *bidonvilles* shacks. At a meeting in Orleansville on 7 April 1955 to discuss reconstruction of the city after the September earthquake surveyors reported that no plan of the shanty town existed and, 'all the plots for construction had been sub-divided and sold off illegally'; minutes online, http://cheliff.org/portail/?q=node/306 [accessed on 31 May 2016].

[32] Djilali Sari, 'Les populations de l'Ouarsenis central', *Méditerranée* 11.3–4 (1972), 106, electoral lists show that 73.8 per cent of electors had migrated from this piedmont.

Some of the Algerians living in the town centres were the descendants of those tribes of the Chelif plain that had been radically broken up by French colonialism well before 1870 and would, after several generations, have probably lost any meaningful sense of their rural origins. Bourdieu and Sayad in *Le Déracinement* accentuated the cultural and psychological disintegration and anomie of peasants plunged into the lumpen-proletarian existence of the shanty towns. However, many peasants had only recently migrated into the centres, and continued to reproduce the social and cultural values of the mountains, including grouping into micro-communities based on the joint family (*ayla*) and the fraction, just as labour migrants did in urban France.[33] Many continued to maintain economic or sentimental ties to their *douars* of origin which was often within walking distance of the towns. In some cases they continued to own fragmentary or microscopic shares of family lands held in common ('*indivision*') and regularly visited relatives, from whom they received supplies of farm produce, ties that were reciprocated by kin who visited when descending to the markets and administrative offices of the towns.[34] The solicitor Abdelkader Klouch, who was born in the shanty town of Bocca Sahnoune in May 1939, remembers the *bidonvilles* as a place in which the poor who arrived there to 'cling on in the town' showed the forms of mutual assistance, fraternity, and charity that was a hallmark of rural communities. The urban settlers retained strong elements of peasant identity and Klouch's grandmother and mother transmitted to Abdelkader and his siblings the oral tradition of their native *douar* of Beni Rached located in the piedmont north-east of Orleansville.[35]

The fluidity of urban-rural social and familial networks was to prove particularly important in the spread of nationalist influences into the interior. While La Ferme and Bocca Sahnoune were to become, as we will see later, hotbeds of communist and Messalist activism, all the urban centres that were strung out

[33] André Prenant, 'Facteurs du peuplement d'une ville de l'Algérie intérieure: Sétif', *Annales de géographie* 62.334 (1953), 434–51, describes peri-urban shanty towns in which, 'rural people fleeing the countryside could be identified by the grouping of their houses according to the *douar* or the centres from which they originated'; Omar Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad. Histoire sociale des radicalismes algériens* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1995), 32–5, on the urban micro-neighbourhood solidarities in which 'the neo-citizens maintained a strong sense of double residence'; Maurice Guetta, 'Urbanisation et structures familiales en Algérie (1948–1987)', *Revue française de sociologie* 32.4 (1991), 577–97, on the reconstitution of the rural extended family in the urban context long into the post-Independence period.

[34] Nadir Boumaza, 'Rapports Ville-Campagne sur le contact Sersou-Ouarsenis', thesis in geography, University of Algiers (1972), 236–43, provides a detailed study of a similar peasant migration from the 1930s southwards from the central Ouarsenis massif to the shanty town of 'El Derb' in Vialar. Here too uprooted peasants retained close ties to their home *douar*. D. Sari, 'Le démantèlement', 71, notes how three migrants to 'Le Derb' still owned two hectares of land in their *douar* of origin.

[35] Interview with Abdelkader Klouch in Chlef (formerly Orleansville), 20 November 2014, who recited one of his mother's songs that recorded opposition to conscription during the First World War that led to major revolts in the Dahra and elsewhere, and praised the power of the German emperor, enemy of France but ally of Muslim Turkey.

along the Chelif plain served an identical function in eventually housing PCA and FLN cells that supplied arms and materials to the guerrilla bands located close to their perimeter. Half of the agricultural workers on the big *colons* estates of the Chelif, who certainly were not subsistence peasants, did not live on the farms but walked in daily from the shanty towns from where they planned many of the night-time guerrilla raids against the *colons* estates of which they had a precise inside knowledge.

The following chapter moves on to examine the interior, the complementary economic, political, and social space of the mountain peasants.

2

Separate Worlds?

Peasant Society in the Mountains

While the French radically dislocated tribal society in the Chelif plain, and massively appropriated the richest agricultural land, the mountain regions remained relatively unaffected by official settlements simply because the rocky scrublands and forests of the interior were of little interest to *colons* eager to appropriate land for modern, commercial farming.[1] This relative absence of European settlement in the interior was reflected in the *commune mixte* (CM) of the Chelif where, in 1946, 651 *colons* were outnumbered by 130,173 Algerians.[2] However, while the traditional forms of subsistence farming survived, the peasant economy was subject to a number of intense pressures that included the penetration of a capitalist market, the monetarization of a barter economy, high taxes, and the displacement of artisanal goods by cheap industrial products. Traditionally peasants had retained their cereal production for family consumption in underground silos (*matmores*), but the forced sale of the harvest due to taxes led farmers to sell their grain at low prices in the late summer, only to be forced by imminent starvation later in the year to buy back cereals when prices were at their highest, often incurring crippling, usurious debts. Equally dramatic was the extent to which colonization disrupted the centuries-old system of agro-pastoralism that through a delicate ecological balance had enabled the peasants to survive in a harsh mountain environment of poor soils, frequent droughts, and severe winters.

As Europeans settled in the Chelif plain after 1843 they found themselves living amid a highly mobile, tent-dwelling population that engaged in a pattern of seasonal transhumance between the mountain interior and the river valleys.[3] In the spring the mountain peasants, who spent part of the year in the 'winter house' (*mechta*), departed in small groups of about twelve or fifteen tents, known as a *douar*, to graze livestock and to cultivate cereals in the valleys.[4] Such seasonal

[1] D. Sari, 'Le démantèlement', indicates how the *sénatus-consulte* process, central to land sales, lost force on the edge of the Chelif and Sersou plains, and ground to a halt by *c*.1900.

[2] AOM 1Y113, PACs reports.

[3] In the mid-Chelif region thousands of tents formed the main habitation in the 1840s along with crofts (*gourbis*), but by the 1930s tents had virtually disappeared owing to official policies of enforced sedentarization, see X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 1.212–15, 2.305, 340–2; X. Yacono, *Les bureaux Arabes*, 48, 234.

[4] Augustin Berque, *Enquête sur l'habitation rurale des indigènes de l'Algérie* (Algiers: Fontana Frères, 1921), 3–18; Marcel Larnaude 'Tentes et habitations fixes en Oranie', *Mélanges de géographie et*

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

movement, that circulated within a radius of about 20 kilometres, made full use of the complementarity of mountain and valley ecosystems, different levels of rainfall, temperature, soil, and vegetation, a pattern of transhumance that could be found throughout northern Algeria and the Mediterranean world.[5] Such a system ensured a multiplicity of food resources, from milk and vegetables to fruit, meat, and cereals, that provided a degree of protection from crop failure and animal disease. During periods of drought, excessive heat, and water failure, that were so common in the notorious 'furnace' of the Chelif valley, the mobile tented group could seek refuge in the cooler higher forest terrain and forage for wild fruits, nuts, acorns, and edible roots.[6]

As settlers appropriated the richest agricultural land in the Chelif plain, as well as in the Sersou on the southern fringes of the Ouarsenis, they disrupted the pattern of transhumance and denied access of the peasantry to the most productive cereal lands. Violent conflicts continued down to the 1950s between *colons* and Algerian pastoralists as the latter drove flocks of sheep and goats from the hills into the plain where they often invaded fields, now demarcated as 'private property', that had traditionally been open for grazing as glebe lands after the harvest. In effect the mountain inhabitants were bottled up in the interior where a rapidly expanding population placed intense pressure on the scatter of small clearings and forest resources. Cut off from their lands in the valleys the peasantry desperately tried to replace their traditional grain supplies by over-cultivation of poor, degraded soils and the invasion and clandestine clearing of the state forests.[7]

However, while the Dahra and Ouarsenis entered into a deepening Malthusian crisis as mountain populations doubled in number between 1900 and 1950, the peasantry responded to colonial conquest and spatial invasion through counter-strategies that defended the integrity of the traditional dispersed settlement patterns of the joint household (*ayla*) and its collective organization in the small clan system of the fraction (*bocca*). The geo-politics of dispersal, that has been largely ignored by historians of Algeria, holds an important key to the overall

d'orientalisme offerts à E. F. Gautier (Tours: Arrault, 1937), 299, maps tent and housing types in the western Ouarsenis.

[5] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1972), 1.85–102; Jacques Blondel, 'The "Design" of Mediterranean Landscapes: A Millenial Story of Humans and Ecological Systems during the Historic Period', *Human Ecology* 34 (2006), 713–29.

[6] The agro-pastoral organization of the complementarity of plain to mountain space can be found throughout Algeria, from the mountains of Tlemcen, Kabylia, Hodna, Collo, and Oued Zenati to the Nemenchas and Aurès, see M. Côte, *L'Algérie ou l'espace retourné*, 64–5; Germaine Tillion, *Il était une fois l'ethnographe* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 27, 112–24. For a particularly detailed analysis and mapping of such short-distance transhumance systems in Libya, see Douglas L. Johnson, *Jabal al-Akhdar, Cyrenaica: A Historical Geography of Settlement* (Chicago: Chicago University, 1973), ch. 2, 29–66.

[7] AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM Chélif, 20 December 1952, indicates the deficit in cereal production between peasants in the mountains and those in the plain or piedmont.

theme of this book.[8] It helps explain how and why sub-tribal peasant organizations were able to survive throughout the colonial period and, through the vectors of memory and everyday politics, were able for so long to frustrate the assimilationist agenda of the colonial state and the developmental project of villagization to force the mountain population into nucleated settlements (see Chapter 5). The Chelif region was specifically chosen by the Psychological Warfare 5th Bureau for the Pilote experiment in 1957 because it was thought that dispersal would disadvantage the FLN guerrillas, a costly strategic mistake that rapidly led to forced concentration into camps that, as they morphed into permanent hamlets, finally achieved the goal of villagization. The question of population distribution, that runs like a thread throughout our period, is worthy of closer inspection.

Comparative studies of the global expansion of European imperialism, invasive frontier societies, show how the expanding colonial state frequently attempted to make nomadic or tribal societies 'legible', subject to civil registration, cadastres, and tax collection, by the permanent settlement of mobile or scattered populations through 'villagization', according to an aesthetic inspired by the rational straight line and the geometric grid. James Scott claims that the authoritarian state had always been the enemy of 'people who move around' and notes that indigenous, resistant 'state-repelling' societies have set out to create social organizations and strategies to impede or block incorporation into the nation state.[9] Such large-scale social engineering was introduced by the Spanish as early as the 'Great Resettlement' of 1569 in the central Andes when the viceroy ordered the concentration of over a million dispersed peasants into six hundred new villages (*reducciones*).[10] A similar logic inspired the early French conquest of the Chelif when General Bugeaud aimed to fix highly mobile tent-dwellers to the soil since the nomadic population of women and children were less vulnerable to destructive raids (*razzias*).[11] Officers of the Bureaux arabes in the Chelif, disciples of Saint-Simon, further developed this ideological vision of a future, modern Algeria in which all nomadic-tribal people would be forced into village agglomerations so

[8] Kamel Katteb, *Européens, «Indigènes» et Juifs en Algérie (1830–1962)*, Cahier 145 (Paris: Éditions National d'Études Démographiques, 2001), 179–84, however, notes how sedentarization represented 'a profound mutation in the socio-economic organisation of the epoch'.

[9] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998) and *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

[10] Jeremy Ravi Mumford, *Vertical Empire: The General Resettlement of Indians in the Colonial Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 49, in 1546 a council of bishops in Mexico City wrote that, 'to be truly Christian and civilized [politicos], as the rational men they are, it is necessary [for Indians] to be congregated and reduced into towns, and not to live scattered and dispersed in the mountains and wilderness'.

[11] X. Yacono, *Les bureaux Arabes*, 102, a letter of Bugeaud, 17 April 1843, stated that villages would 'tie them to the land and give them permanent, fixed interests that would make them less inclined to revolt'. This reflected the classic nineteenth-century bourgeoise ideology that property ownership would stabilize the 'dangerous classes'.

that they would rapidly assimilate to the municipal government and 'civilization' of the French commune.[12]

By the 1930s the colonial state had virtually eliminated the tent and local transhumance in the Chelif region, but had signally failed in its objective of forcing mountain peasants into villages. The strong preference of the agro-pastoralist for the free-standing *mechta*, a tent group in built form, was that this approximated most closely to the existing cultural and social values of the '*douar*' circle of ten to fifteen related families, that enjoyed the freedom to move around independent of any wider entity or village. In the free-standing or isolated *mechta* each household, as with a tent circle, had immediate access to gardens, fields, and livestock literally at the door of the farmhouse.[13] Each individual house, known as a *gourbis*, consisted of a low, wood-frame, single-storey structure with walls of beaten earth and a heavy, thatched roof, usually set into the hillside.[14]

The isolated *mechta* was an expression of the cultural values of a society that prized the sacred and enclosed space of the farmhouse, a fortress of the patriarch, and his rule over an extended, multi-generational household of married sons, and numerous wives and children. Isolation behind a large cactus and picket fence kept all 'strangers' at bay, and protected the women, and the honour of the family, from prying eyes. The sociologist Claudine Chaulet found that such values were still very much alive in the 1970s, long after the Algerian War.[15]

Even the most isolated peasants, fully aware of the nature and danger of the legal mechanisms of dispossession, quickly moved to pre-empt the loss of their own lands by future *sénatus* commissioners that threatened to classify it as domain, or apportion parts of it to others, by asserting a visible private ownership (*melk*) through ploughing, boundary marking, and other signs of use-rights.[16] Peasants often reacted in panic to the arrival of *sénatus* commissioners, as they did in the *douar* Zeddine in the Ouarsenis piedmont, by clearing and cultivating land, on the basis of the principle of Islamic law that the land belonged to him who worked it.[17] The construction of more durable houses at the *mechta* location was

[12] X. Yacono, *Les bureaux Arabes*. On the colonial ideology of village settlement, see my chapter, 'From Tent to Village Regroupement: The Colonial State and Social Engineering of Rural Space, 1843–1962', in Ed Naylor (ed.), *France's Modernising Mission: Citizenship, Welfare and the Ends of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 109–31.

[13] In the nucleated villages to be found in Kabylia, Provence, and other parts of the Mediterranean littoral, peasants who lived within densely inhabited, fortified agglomerations, had to walk daily out to fields that were often located far from the residence.

[14] See the EU MEDA programme to classify the traditional housing types of the Mediterranean, on the 'Maison de l'Ouarsenis' at <fronac.r.f.f.unblog.fr/files/2009/01/alt31.pdf> accessed on 26 December 2019.

[15] Claudine Chaulet, *La terre, les frères et l'argent*, 3 vols (Algiers: OPU, 1987).

[16] A. Rey-Goldzeiguier, *Le royaume Arabe*, 694; Charles-Robert, *Les algériens musulmans et la France* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 1.69, 'historically Maghrebin communities had always reacted to the threat of [land] confiscation by working the soil or by hasty clearances so as to affirm their rights since for them ownership was tied to the concept of labour value (mise en valeur)'.

[17] A. Sainte-Marie, 'Législation foncière', 80.

frequently undertaken as an insurance, a marker of possession, not because, as administrators often claimed, the peasants were evolving in their lifestyles and aspiring to the comforts of the European house.[18] On occasion, as on the Plateau of Terni in the mountains near Tlemçen in 1936, entire communities dramatically converted en masse from tent to fixed housing in a matter of months.[19]

CM administrators and *caids* tried, without success, to use the draconian powers of the native code to prevent peasants building *gourbis* in isolated locations.[20] Administrators regarded the construction of isolated farmhouses as a sign of deviant behaviour or an act of resistance to the authorities, an attempt to escape the control of the *caid* in matters relating to taxation, forest regulations, civil registration, poaching, and other matters of state surveillance and policing. In 1872 an administrator in the mountainous Zerdeza of the northern Constantinois ordered *djemâa* presidents to concentrate their populations into centres where they could be subjected to closer surveillance and stopped from thieving. He had punished some who had persisted in remaining isolated, since 'these recalcitrants had only bad intentions in wishing to isolate themselves'. The following year more hungry peasants had taken the opportunity of mobility during the harvest to construct clandestine, isolated *gourbis*: 'Their obvious intent is to evade surveillance by the agents of the administration, to conceal their flocks during the [tax] census or to more easily engage in wrongdoing'.[21]

Despite such attempts to shape and police rural space, the colonial administration was largely powerless to impede the formation of dispersed settlement and this was to have major, long-term socio-cultural and political implications. As peasants settled permanently they formed small fractions, called locally *boccas*, in which a community of some two hundred to five hundred people lived in joint family households or *ayla*, so that each farmhouse (*mechta*) was carefully separated from neighbours by its own 'private' space of vegetable gardens, animal compounds, and small arable plots or open grazing.[22] In 1946 the administrator

[18] Augustin Bernard and Nicole Lacroix, 'L'évolution du nomadisme en Algérie', *Annales de géographie* 15.80 (1906), 162. Here, as in the Ouarsenis, 'the better-off natives tend to build houses as a sign of ownership of the land they cultivate; but this does not mean that they abandon their nomadic existence'.

[19] André Lecocq, 'La transformation de l'habitat indigène sur le Plateau de Terni', *Revue africaine* 81 (1937), 287, 298.

[20] C.-R. Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine* (Paris: PUF, 1979), 2.209, under the 1885 Code, peasants who constructed *gourbis* within 1 kilometre of a forest faced a fine of 50 Fr. The *Revue algérienne et tunisienne de législation et de jurisprudence*, Part 3 (1905), 102, on the law of 10 December 1904 that renewed the native code for a further seven years, included a prohibition on 'Isolated dwellings located outside the hamlet (*dechra*) or *douar* without authorisation from the administrator or his delegates; nor encampments in prohibited places'.

[21] Karim Rahem, *Le sillage de la tribu. Imaginaires politiques et histoire en Algérie (1843–1993)* (Paris: Riveneuve éditions, 2008), 199–200; see also Christine Mussard, 'Du déni de citoyenneté', in D. Guignard (ed.), *Propriété et société* 150.

[22] For the map of such a dispersed hamlet, see that of the *bocca* of Metidja in the *douar* of Beni Hindel, in Jacques Lizot, *Metidja. Un village algérien de l'Ouarsenis* (Algiers: SNED, 1973), 104, fig. 30. This loose grouping '*en grappe*' is still clearly visible today on Google Earth satellite photographs.

of the CM of Chelif, Rohrbacher, described the typical Ouarsenis fraction, 'the *bocca*, the basic cell of the *douar*, consists on average of seventy families, hence seventy dwellings.... The *boccas* in question far from constituting a compact body consist rather of a grouping of different-sized *gourbis* dispersed across a broken terrain, without any proper plan or order, sometimes forming small groups of three or four houses spaced 50 to 100 metres apart or more clearly separated from each other by distances varying from 20 to 300 metres'.[23]

The large, extended family group (*ayla*) and not the nuclear family, closely regulated by Islamic law and custom, constituted the fundamental cell or building block of Algerian rural society.[24] In the Dahra and Ouarsenis the close kin-group, a joint or stem family, lived under an elder protector, to whom adult males, including married sons, owed obedience and whose role was to oversee the working of the joint economy, to maintain solidarity, and to represent externally the political interests of the group.[25] When sons grew up and married, their young wives moved by custom into the farm and the new couple would be accommodated in turn by the construction of an extra room built onto the original core house, usually to form the sides of a courtyard in which the women carried out shared tasks of cooking, washing clothes, and childcare in a private space protected from the eyes of strangers.[26] Auto-construction enabled habitable space to be extended or added to in a modular way according to changing need, and the better-off households often contained up to thirty or more individuals.[27] The large, joint families, 'rich' in able-bodied men, constituted a not inconsiderable

[23] AOM 1Y113, PAC report 'Habitat', 9 August 1946.

[24] On the family in Algeria and the Maghreb, see Robert Descloitres and Laid Debzi, 'Système de parenté et structures familiales en Algérie', *Annuaire afrique du nord* (1963), 23–60; M. M. Cherrad, *Women's Rights*; Jean Cuisenier, 'The Domestic Cycle in the Traditional Family Organization in Tunisia', ch. 5; and N. Abu-Zahra, 'Family and Kinship in a Tunisian Peasant Community', both in J. G. Peristiany (ed.), *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), 137–71.

[25] We owe the existence of anthropological research in the Chelif, rare outside Kabylia and the Aurès, to Jeanne Favret who, after she replaced Bourdieu in the Algier's Faculty of Letters in 1959, led a small research team that carried out fieldwork in the adjacent *douars* of Beni Hindel and Ouled Ghalia: see J. Lizot, *Metidja*; and J. Vignet-Zunz, 'Hommes de l'Ouarsenis. Une communauté rurale d'Algérie', doctoral thesis, University Réné Descartes, Paris, 1972. Jeanne Favret based an influential essay on this project, 'Le traditionalisme par excès de modernité', *Archives Européennes de sociologie* 7 (1967), 71–93, reprinted in Jeanne Favret-Saada (ed.), *Algérie 1962–1964*, Essais d'anthropologie politique (Paris: Éditions Bouchène, 2005), 33–62. In addition we have the ethnological work of Louis Kergoat on the peasantry of Bissa in the Dahra to which I return later.

[26] M. Côte, *Pays, paysages, paysans*, 22–7; Zeynep Çeylik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontation: Algiers under French Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ch. 3, 'The Indigenous House', 87–97.

[27] AOM 4SAS73, a detailed SAS report of 1957, records precisely the seventy-six joint family households that constituted the fraction of the Ouled Ben Ali in the *douar* of Djelida in the eastern Chelif valley. Among these families, for example, the three-generation Bellarbi had some thirty members, including twelve adult males, under the leadership of Mohammed ben Mohammed Belarbi. Such large households continue to exist today in the piedmont *douar* of Harchoun that I visited in 2014.

political force in their own right, similar in kind to that found in other parts of the Mediterranean world, such as the Balkan *zadruga*.[28]

French historical geographers have developed the theory of an inverse relationship between the bocages regions of western France, in which widely dispersed settlement prevented an intense municipal life, and the regions in which large villages made for a high level of sociability in cafés, associations, clubs, and churches.[29] In Chelif peasant society in which the power, status, and wealth of a family lay in the number and physical strength of adult males, the *ayla* constituted a political force when they operated as a tightly cohesive unit under the direction of a capable leader, as we will see later in the case of the Zitoufi family (Chapter 13). The extended Chelif household shows a remarkable similarity to that found by Bernard Derouet in his comparative study of large, joint families that existed in dispersed settlements throughout the mountainous areas of the Alps and Pyrenees, and the Mediterranean regions, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.[30] These households of up to fifty individuals were sufficiently self-regulating and autonomous to constitute a micro-level 'municipal system' that assumed many of the functions usually associated with the commune or parish administration.[31] In the Chelif mountains, as elsewhere in Algeria, the patriarchal heads of households living in the same hamlet or *bocca* would meet in a small assembly (*djemâa*) to regulate the affairs of the community.

The family-based communities studied by Derouet constituted highly integrated and enduring bodies that lay, significantly, below and outside the administrative structures of the state. Likewise in the Chelif the 'unofficial' or 'clandestine' *djemâas*, which were organized by predominantly illiterate elders, according to custom and oral tradition without written codes or minutes,

[28] The Serbian *zadruga* contained, exceptionally, up to eighty or more individuals: see E. A. Hammel, 'The Zadruga as Process', ch. 14; and Joel M. Halpern, 'Town and Countryside in Serbia in the Nineteenth Century: Social and Household Structure as Reflected in the Census of 1863', ch. 16, in Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), 335–72, 401–27; also Halpern, *A Serbian Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

[29] André Siegfried, *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest sous la Troisième République* (Paris: A. Colin, [1st edn 1913] 1964), ch. 34. The relationship between village sociability and rural radicalism has been studied by Maurice Agulhon, *The Republic in the Village: The People of the Var from the French Revolution to the Second Republic* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982); Peter M. Jones, in his work on the *bocages* societies of the Massif Central notes the existence of a 'patchwork of miniature closed societies, adjacent and yet fiercely independent, autarchic and endogamous', that bear a striking resemblance to the Chelif region, 'An Improbable Democracy: Nineteenth-century Elections in the Massif Central', *English Historical Review* 97 (1982), 535; see also his, 'Parish, Seigneurie and the Community of Inhabitants in Southern Central France during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Past and Present* 91 (1981), 74–108.

[30] Bernard Derouet, 'Territoire et parenté. Pour une mise en perspective de la communauté rurale et des formes de reproduction familiale', *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales* 3 (1995), 645–86.

[31] B. Derouet, 'Territoire et parenté', 661. Such extended family entities, 'federations of houses', were also to be found in the Italian *vicinia* and the northern Spanish *vecindad*; see also Jean-François Soulet, *La vie quotidienne dans les Pyrénéés sous l'Ancien Régime (du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Hachette, 1974), 219–53, on the '*vesiaux*' or '*voisins*'.

constituted 'state-repelling' bodies that in time were to provide a base for guerrilla organizations.[32]

The Battle for the Forests: Demographic Crisis and Peasant Resistance

During the 1930s the Algerian government became increasingly concerned by signs of a deepening 'Third World' crisis in which a rapid increase in the Algerian population was outstripping stagnant food production, in particular of vital cereals.[33] Following the famine of 1945 the demographer Louis Chevalier was sent on a mission to French North Africa and reported on a long-term collapse in the per capita production of cereals, from five quintals a year in 1871, to four quintals in 1900, and two in 1946.[34] The chronic food shortage was most keenly felt in the rural hinterland, and in particular among the mountain peasants of the Dahra and Ouarsenis. The traditional subsistence economy of the *douars* was dependent on intense cultivation of small plots of irrigated land planted with potatoes, onions, leeks, courgettes, tomatoes, carrots and beans, and tree crops of apricots, apples, peaches, pomegranates, plums, pears, almonds, and especially figs, which were dried and stored for the winter. But most vital to the peasants, especially in years of famine, were the surrounding forests, scrublands, and bush that provided grazing for cattle, sheep, and goats as well as a range of products, from timbers and thatch for house construction to charcoal, kindling, fencing, and plough frames that could be sold in local markets.[35]

In the past the agro-pastoralists had responded to periodic famine or local demographic pressure by expanding into the extensive forests, clearing new fields, extending their flocks, or by foraging for nuts and edible plants. However, the deepening political crisis of the bled arose primarily from the fact that the rapidly increasing population was denied access to the crucial reserve of the forests.[36]

[32] The geographer M. Côte, *Pays, paysages, paysans*, 236, comments on peasant resistance to the modern state in Algeria based on the endurance of the extended family, 'They conserved fragments of the old traditional structures that continued to function parallel to that of the state'.

[33] Lucien Paye, 'Evolution du peuplement de l'Afrique du Nord', *Politique étrangère* 3 (1937), 263–81, in an analysis of the March 1936 census, recognized the dangers of the impending Malthusian crisis, and the need to carry out major economic reform, 'in such a way as to feed, on a limited area of land, an ever increasing population'.

[34] L. Chevalier, *Le problème démographique*, 88–91; Hosni Boukerzaza, 'Croissance démographique et problème alimentaire en Algérie. L'exemple des céréales', *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 68–9 (1993), 255–63.

[35] Djilali Sari, 'L'équilibre économique traditionnel des populations de l'Ouarsenis central', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 9 (1971), 63–89; Pierre Lapalud, *Le douar Aghbal. Monographie economique* (Algiers: Jules Carbonel Réunies, 1934) provides a valuable overview of the mountain economy based on fieldwork observation in the Dahra in the 1930s.

[36] On the demographic explosion in the Ouarsenis and the very high population density, see D. Sari, 'Les populations de l'Ouarsenis central'.

The intense pressure on the forests was compounded by the fact that isolated peasant communities had been unable to find, unlike the mountain Kabyles, a safety valve through emigration or commerce.[37] Caught in a poverty trap, a classic Malthusian crisis of population increase and static resources, the mountain peasants responded through an intensification of existing methods of subsistence farming, leading to a deepening cycle of impoverishment that, following Clifford Geertz, can be described as one of 'agricultural involution'.[38] Such a form of agricultural involution, as in the Ouarsenis, did not lead to a dissolving of traditional forms of organization and communal ownership of land, a collapse into a wage-labour proletariat, but rather its reinforcement. Such a desperate route, which could be termed one of 'static expansion' or 'self-exploitation', locked the peasantry into an enduring cycle of poverty that would, for a while, block the road to economic modernization.[39]

Just as a starving peasantry turned to fall back on its traditional reserve, the forest resources, it found itself excluded by the intrusion of large capitalist concessions for mines and hydroelectric projects and by draconian forest regulations.[40] A law of 16 June 1851 had proclaimed that all forests in Algeria were state property, unless specific title could be demonstrated, which very few peasants or *djemâas* could do since they exercised mobile and changing use-rights of grazing and cultivation in an open landscape. The forestry service (*Eaux et fôrets*) in Algeria had, by 1872, aggressively laid claim to 2,084,379 hectares of forest, to which it had added another 1.2 million hectares by 1888. This increase was, in part, achieved through the *sénatus-consulte* process in which survey commissioners maximized the area designated as state domain, by including areas of brush, open pasturage, and even cultivated zones, under the peculiar category

[37] AOM 1K/354, monthly report, CM Chelif, June 1954. In 1954 1,888 emigrants from the CM were living in France, a relatively low figure of 1.5 per cent of the population. Most of these had departed from the plain rather than the isolated mountain *douars*.

[38] Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

[39] The concept of 'self-exploitation' was developed by the Soviet theorist A. V. Chayanov. See also Joel S. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution: Pressures towards Political and Social Change in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), a comparative study of 'inward-oriented' peasant communities that, confronted with the destructive impacts of market forces, have historically avoided exploitation by withdrawing from contact and by developing institutions to shield themselves from external destabilizing forces.

[40] On the forest regime and its impact on mountain society: see F. Gourgeot, *Les sept plaies d'Algérie* (Algiers: P. Fontana, 1891), 181–241; C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens*, 103–28, 489–94, and his *Histoire contemporaine*, 206–10; André Nouschi, 'Notes sur la vie traditionnelle des populations forestières algériennes', *Annales de géographie* 68.370 (1959), 525–35; David Prochaska, 'Fire on the Mountain: Resisting Colonialism in Algeria', in Donald Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Socialist Protest in Africa* (London: James Curry, 1986), 89–108; Diane K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Jean-Yves Puyo, 'La politique forestière du Protectorat marocain, outil de pacification "politique" des zones rurales?', in Samia el Mechat (ed.), *Coloniser, pacifier, administrer XIXe–XXIe siècles* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2014), 265–77.

of terrain designated as 'un-wooded forest'.[41] The colonial state introduced the metropolitan French forest code of 1827 into an ecology for which it was not suited, and followed it up by a sequence of major acts that enabled further expropriation (1859), and introduced the principle of collective punishment for infractions such as fires (1874).[42] Peasants found themselves suddenly excluded from forests where they had always been free to use the resources, and subjected to heavy fines and prison sentences for grazing their livestock, gathering sticks or branches, making charcoal, cultivating clearings, gathering nuts and thatching grass, or other infringement of the 225 articles of the code. The national statistics of forest infractions between 1929 and 1932 are a testament to the daily illegal incursion of desperate peasants into the state domains.[43] Forest fires were invariably regarded by the authorities as the political work of criminal incendiaries and entire communities were punished through crippling collective fines and a ban on livestock grazing for five years.[44]

The forestry service, which had increased in Algeria to about a thousand men in 1898, gained notoriety, even among some administrators, as an aggressive, autonomous body that relentlessly policed the peasantry from their heavily fortified forest houses. The attitude of the forest guards, who viewed themselves as at war with the mountain peasants, was summed up by an officer at Sidi Moussa in the Chelif who, after a forest fire in October 1891, remarked: 'We have to hit these louts with such heavy fines that they have nothing left.... They are my subjects and finally they must submit. It's a war to the death with them.'[45]

By the 1930s a reformist current in the central government, anxious at the deepening crisis in peasant society and the rise of nationalism, attempted, without much success, to rein in the forestry service. On 28 April 1933 the Governor General J. Carde sent instructions to the heads of the forestry service to ensure that during the depression some moderation would be shown in the application of the forest laws and penalties. This had little, if any, impact and the Governor had to write again on 8 August to insist that his order be followed since 'an excessive

[41] AOM 9140/47, in 1954 about 72 per cent (60,000 of 83,500 hectares) of forest in the Dahra was state domains, in the Ouarsenis 81 per cent (113,000 of 139,000 hectares).

[42] The 1827 Code had sparked major revolts in metropolitan France, see Peter Sahlins, *Forest Rites: The War of the Demoiselles in Nineteenth-century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Tamara L. Whited, *Forests and Peasant Politics in Modern France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000).

[43] Augustin Berque, 'La forêt algérienne' (1935), in Jacques Berque (ed.), *Augustin Berque. Écrits sur l'Algérie* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1986), 171–8. Prosecutions for illegal grazing averaged 32,000 per year and for wood cutting, 19,069.

[44] D. Sari, 'Le démantèlement', 62, collective sanctions were imposed in the Ouarsenis in 1903 on the Beni Ouazane, Beni Bou Khanous, and Beni Bou Attab; in 1914 on the Beni Bou Khanous, Lardjem, and Beni Boudaoune; in 1916 on the Beni Chaib. Djilali Sari, *L'homme et l'érosion dans l'Ouarsenis (Algérie)* (Algiers: SNED, 1977), 222–4, the fines imposed on the Ouarsenis *douars* between 1881 and 1934 frequently reflected enormous penalties that could be up to twenty times the estimated value of the damages being claimed.

[45] D. Sari, *L'homme*, 221.

severity' was creating tensions, forcing men to leave their families to escape fines they could not pay, and leading to attacks on forest guards. Carde was particularly concerned at the seizure of land from peasants within the protected re-afforestation zones that was being exploited by political propagandists and should be halted until further notice.[46] Despite the attempt to alleviate the highly punitive regime through various laws like that of 30 July 1935, little real change was effected.[47]

The forest regime in the Dahra and Ouarsenis was particularly draconian because of two further factors, the presence of extensive resin and mining concessions and hydroelectric-irrigation dams. The mining company of *La Vieille Montagne* at Bou Caid, and the Breira mine in the Dahra, occupied thousands of hectares for their operations, including the cutting of pit props. The *Société resinière de l'Ouarsenis*, '*La côte rouge*', annually tapped millions of pine trees for resin, and had a particular interest in policing the forest zones.[48]

Most devastating of all for the mountain peasants was the deepening severity of an environmental catastrophe that resulted from the long-term impact of colonialism in disrupting the traditional, transhumant agro-pastoral economy that had achieved an ecological balance between population and resources. The rapid demographic increase from the 1930s meant that desperate peasants, deprived of their cereal lands in the plain, placed intense pressure on the protected forest zone, by clearing trees and undergrowth to cultivate illegal clearings and burn charcoal, or to browse sheep and goats that devastated saplings, leading to massive soil erosion of the steep slopes and the loss of topsoils.[49] Diane K. Davis has argued that the colonial state developed a spurious pseudo-scientific theory that the historic deforestation of Algeria was brought about by the invasion of Arab nomads, desert people culturally uncaring about forest resources, that had brought about a catastrophic desertification. The theory of climate change provided the regime with an ideology that legitimated the global exclusion of peasants from the forests in the name of public utility and the scientific management of resources.[50] This ideology assumed a particularly critical form in the Ouarsenis with the completion of the huge Steeg Dam in 1934. The extensive reservoir flooded the most fertile, irrigated fields in the Beni Bouattab and Chouchaoua, where the peasants, refusing a derisory compensation, clung onto the steep slopes above and cut back scrub and trees that had stabilized the topsoils.[51] It soon became apparent that erosion in the extensive basin of the Oued Fodda River was

[46] AOM 91301/20, CM Braz, *délits forestières*.

[47] A. Berque, 'La forêt algérienne', 171–82.

[48] AOM 1Y113, PAC reports 1946: in Beni Hindel five-sixths of the total area of the *douar* had been taken over by the mine.

[49] D. Sari, *L'homme*, has studied in detail the nature of this environmental disaster.

[50] D. K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary*. At the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1889 the entrance to the Algerian Pavillion contained a sarcophagus erected to the memory of Algeria's forests.

[51] AOM 1Y113, PACs report 28 June 1946. In the *douar* Guerboussa 1,400 hectares was expropriated by the state for another future dam.

silting up the reservoir of the Steeg Dam so rapidly that hydroelectric and irrigation projects were at risk, the source of the considerable wealth that accrued to the big estate owners in the plain. In the Ouarsenis and Dahra a programme of reforestation was advanced by the creation in 1941 of the *Défense et Restauration des Sols* (DRS) that set out to persuade or coerce peasants into providing labour for anti-erosion measures that included extensive terracing projects and planting of tree crops.[52] The extension of protected forest zones (*périmetres de reboissement*), to cover even the woods that belonged to the peasant commune, succeeded in virtually extending the draconian regime of controls to the entire mountainous space. The DRS reforestation programme, which was seen by the government as crucial to the long-term future of the rural population, was resisted by peasants who, faced with the immediacy of starvation conditions, could not wait several years before terracing and planting of fruit trees could produce any results.[53]

Banditry and Peasant Resistance in the Forests

Historians of modern Algeria, influenced by Eric Hobsbawm's theory of 'social banditry' and 'primitive rebels', have long debated the question of whether mountain peasants engaged in forms of lawless armed resistance that acted as a precursor of the final liberation movement.[54] Early guerrilla leaders, it has been suggested, were recruited directly from the mountain outlaws.[55] Most of the

[52] AOM 9140/47, 'Notes sur le département' [Orleansville], November 1961, provides technical details of the DRS project. Peasants were held responsible for the silting of the Steeg Dam, but the Vichy regime, faced with wartime shortage of petrol, resorted to massive timber cuts to supply gas fuel for vehicles.

[53] The land grab by Europeans of the Kikuyu reserves in Kenya's Central Province led to an identical pattern of peasant over-cultivation and grazing of forests that precipitated soil erosion. The colonial government created in the late 1930s the Soil Conservation Service that, based on the Tennessee Valley project, forced the population to provide labour for contour terracing, a hated programme that contributed towards the Mau Mau revolt: see M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country* (London/Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967), 42–3.

[54] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), and *Bandits* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

[55] See Jean Dejeux, 'Un bandit d'honneur dans l'Aurès de 1917 à 1921. Messaoud Ben Zelmat', *Revue de l'occident musulmane et de la Méditerranée* 26.1 (1978), 35–54; Alain Sainte-Marie, 'Réflexions sur le banditisme en Algérie à la fin du X1Xe: Grande Kabylie' (Oran: CRIDSSH, 1984); Abdelkader Djeghloul, 'Hors-la-loi, violence rurale et pouvoir colonial en Algérie au début du XXe siècle: les frères Boutouizerat', *Revue de l'occident musulmane et de la Méditerranée* 38 (1984), 37–45; Peter von Sivers, 'Rural Uprisings as Political Movements in Colonial Algeria, 1851–1914', in Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus (eds), *Islam, Politics and Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 39–59; Daho Djerbal, 'Dissonances et discordances mémoriélles. Le cas des Aurès (1930–1962)', *L'année du Maghreb* 4 (2008), 171–90; Settar Ouatmani, 'Arezky L'Bachir. Un «bandit d'honneur» en Kabylie au X1Xe siècle', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 136 (2014); Abdelnar Guedjiba, 'Insoumis et bandits chez les Béni Ouslimane du Zellatou (Aurès)', in Fanny Colonna and Loic Le Pape (eds), *Traces, désir de savoir et volonté d'être. L'après-colonie au Maghreb* (Paris: Sindbad, 2010), 231–49; Samuel Kalman, 'Criminalizing Dissent: Policing Banditry in

research has focused on banditry in Kabylia and the Aurès, but in the Chelif region we find very little evidence of an outlaw tradition, apart from the widespread practice of livestock rustling (*bechara*).[56] For over a century, from the last great Millenarian jacquerie of Bou Maza of 1845 through to the first guerrilla movements of 1955, there was little sign of armed revolt in the Chelif, apart from three brief surges at Margueritte in 1901, the conscription and famine crisis of 1916 to 1920, and an invasion of *colons* farms by hungry peasants in 1945. I look briefly at each of these in turn.

The Margueritte micro-revolt, which lasted only eight hours, was in part related to the build up of tensions in the forest zone. Forest fines had increased from 132 cases in 1899 to 219 in 1900, and the first of five Europeans to be killed on 26 April 1901 was the field guard, Labessède. The revolt was however quite exceptional for the fact that it manifested itself as a millenarian *djihad*, a dramatic eruption that is of great historical interest since it revealed the underlying tensions, the 'hidden transcript' that peasant subalterns habitually concealed from their colonial masters.[57]

A second threat to the colonial order in the Chelif appeared in 1916 when peasants resisted conscription, a crisis that merged into a phase of political turbulence as radicalized troops were demobilized after 1918 and returned home to face the worst Algerian famine of the twentieth century. The anti-conscription movement of 1916–17 swept out from its epicentre in the Aurès region westwards across the Tell, presenting a grave threat to military security at a time when the army was tied down in the European theatre. In the Dahra west of Ténès, where in late 1916 two gendarmes were assassinated near Rabelais, *colons* fled to the townships where they formed militias, and 248 deserters and '*insoumis*'

the Constantinois, 1914–18', in Rabah Aissaoui and Claire Eldridge (eds), *Algeria Revisited: History, Culture and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 19–38.

[56] AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM des Braz, 1953; the administrator L. Olive noted that there was little banditry in the region, apart from an area of dense forests of the *douar* Lyra, 'an ideal refuge for cattle thieves (the family Bensahra of Ouaguenay)'. On the *bechara*, see Sylvie Thénault, *Violence ordinaire dans l'Algérie coloniale. Camps, internement, assignations à résidence* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2012), 50; Didier Guignard, *L'abus de pouvoirs dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2010), 90–5.

[57] Christian Phéline, *L'aube d'une révolution. Margueritte, Algérie, 26 avril 1901* (Toulouse: Privat, 2012); 'La révolte de Margueritte: résistance à la colonisation dans une Algérie «pacifiée» (1901–3)', in A. Bouchène (ed.), *Histoire*, 249–55; *Un guadeloupéen à Alger. Me Maurice L'Admiral* (1864–1955) (Paris: Riveneuves Éditions, 2014), and 'Deux cas locaux de résistance paysanne à l'extension des terres de colonisation: la révolte de Margueritte (1901) et l'affaire des Beni-Dergoun (1895–1923)', in Didier Guignard (ed.), *Propriété et société en Algérie contemporaine. Quelles approches?* (Aix-en-Provence: IREMAM, 2017), 207–25; C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans*, 2.606–8, 965–79; Jennifer Sessions, 'Débattre de la licitation comme stratégie d'acquisitions des terres à la fin du XIXe siècle', in D. Guignard (ed.), *Propriété et société*, 60–76, and 'Making Settlers Muslim: Religion, Resistance and Everyday Life in Nineteenth-century French Algeria', *French History* 33.2 (2019), 259–77.

were arrested.[58] Young deserters fled into the mountains where they formed armed bands and became reactivated after May 1920 as harvest failure led to a general collapse of law and order in the *douars*. So-called 'brigand' bands, led by demobilized soldiers, seized arms from the barracks at Blida, laid siege to the gendarmerie at Renault, carried out raids on isolated farmhouses to take livestock and food reserves, and attacked a post office, lorry transports, and goods train.[59] The Orleansville press claimed that *caids* were incapable of containing a rising tide of crime in the mountains and were secretly complicit with 'banditry' or organized outlaws as in the case of the *caid* of Lavarande in the eastern Chelif and his two sons who were arrested for leading attacks on railway stations and farms, and a *caid* near Mascara, in Oranie, who had organized the hold-up of a bus.[60]

Rohrbacher, the CM administrator, was anxious in May 1945 that the massive insurrection in the Sétif region would trigger revolt in the Ouarsenis. In the eastern Chelif valley large armed bands of two hundred to five hundred starving and desperate peasants invaded both *colons* and Algerian farms during the nights of 10, 17, and 20 May, and again on 13 and 19 June, to cut standing crops although they were still green. Usually when the gendarmes intervened there was an exchange of gunfire, and the crowds rapidly dispersed, but reports admitted that it was 'impossible for the gendarmes, so thin on the ground, to prevent such attacks. The isolated European population are seized by fear at the prospect of these numerous armed bands circulating at night around their houses.'[61] However, General Breuillac, commander of the Algiers division, refused to get drawn into repressive operations and said he would dispatch the 13th Infantry Regiment that had arrived from France, but only when it had settled in.[62]

The events of 1901, 1916–20, and 1945 in the Chelif were remarkable, less for the scale of peasant unrest that was quite minor, than for the disproportionate level of panic that seized the European population. For all the overt assertiveness of *colons* domination, events like that of Margueritte left a deep scar on the *colons* psyche, a permanent psychosis that 'fanatical' primitives could, at any moment, erupt as an elemental force and overrun farms and villages. In Molière and Teniet el Haad Europeans reacted to the Setif crisis of May 1945 by fleeing in panic to the civil defence bunkers that had been planned for such a contingency. The latent, but permanent, European fear of a general rising by Algerians, especially among

[58] G. Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée. La guerre de 1914–1918 et le premier quart du XXe siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), 571–2, 578.

[59] *Le progrès*, April 1920 to March 1921.

[60] *Le progrès*, 11 November 1920, 17 and 24 February 1921. *Le progrès*, 30 September 1920 reporting on the arrest of twenty-seven Algerians after a night attack on a farm, noted it was important to locate the leaders, 'whom the native deputies [*caids*] should denounce rather than make profit from them'. *Colons*, who shared a very low opinion of the *caids*, thought that they were linked to the widespread system of cattle-rustling (*bechara*).

[61] AOM 1K/361, secret report of the Gendarmerie Nationale, Algiers, 23 June 1945.

[62] Jean-Louis Planche, *Sétif 1945. Histoire d'un massacre annoncé* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), 259–60.

the 'primitives' massed in the mountains, evoked an aggressive, punitive response in which a recognition of the weak apparatus of the colonial state in the interior was compensated by repressive laws and a totally disproportionate violence by *colons* militias, the gendarmeries, and military against entire communities and regions.[63]

The hypersensitivity of the colonial regime to perceived acts of 'anti-French' criminality may have led some historians to exaggerate the level of subversive activity in rural society. Instead of looking for early signs of peasant contestation as a precursor of the 1954 revolt, as historians have usually done, it might be more meaningful to ask the question as to why, during the century from 1843 to 1945, there were so few armed movements in the Chelif region.[64] One key factor was that the most influential elders in the *douars*, the patriarchs that stood at the head of the extended family and dominated the *djemâas*, retained a precise historic memory of the catastrophic implications of past tribal revolt, *jacqueries*, or individual acts of resistance that had brought down the repressive weight of the colonial regime against their families and communities. Political power in the fraction lay with a generation of elders that were not prepared to tolerate acts of hot-headed adventurism by young men that had no chance of withstanding the French army and invited punitive destruction of their families and the entire community.[65]

However, while peasant leaders avoided localized revolts that could be rapidly isolated and crushed they were prepared to engage in, or tolerate, endemic forms of illegal or clandestine activity in which entire peasant communities engaged in a permanent 'low intensity' warfare against the forest authorities. As James Scott has argued, peasant societies were not as quiescent as they may have seemed since they often avoided direct or overt resistance for defensive strategies that thwarted landlords and state power through thousands of petty everyday, individual acts.[66] The archives for the Chelif region contain innumerable documents relating to such forest conflicts and two case studies help illustrate the issues surrounding

[63] S. Thénault, *Violence ordinaire*, 40–5. This reactive response was particularly evident following the Margueritte and Sétif events of 1901 and 1945.

[64] Alain Sainte-Marie, 'Législation foncière et société rurale. L'application de la loi du 26 juillet 1873 dans les douars de l'Algérois', *Études rurales* 57 (1975), 64, notes that overt acts of resistance to land appropriations were 'extremely rare'. C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens*, 1.128, notes that Europeans frequently expressed surprise at the failure of peasants to rise up against the extreme injustices that they faced and often ascribed this to a high degree of Islamic 'fatalism'.

[65] Hocine Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires d'un combattant. L'esprit d'indépendance 1942–1952* (Paris: Sylvie Messinger, 1983), 42; M. Lacheraf, *L'Algérie*, 27, in 1955 elders in a village in the Bibans advised of the need to avoid, 'the tactical mistakes from which many insurgents and their families in the region suffered during the national uprising of 1871'.

[66] James C. Scott, 'Resistance without Protest and without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic Zakat and the Christian Tithes', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1987), 417–52. The aim of such resistance was not to overthrow a system of domination, but to survive.

the perpetual attrition through illegal grazing of livestock, woodcutting, and charcoal burning.[67]

The devastating drought of 1944–5 that affected the whole of North Africa not only led to a collapse in cereal production and famine conditions, but also decimated livestock that usually served as a fall-back reserve for peasants in times of crisis. This led to a wave of intense pressure by desperate peasants on the protected forest resources. On 21 September 1945 militant peasants headed by Slimane Moussaoui seized control of the isolated *douar* of Zouggara during the *djemâa* elections on 21 September 1945, winning 68 per cent of the vote and campaigned for increased access to forest grazing.[68] On 25 February 1946 the *djemâa* sent a resolution to the administrator of Braz requesting, in view of the lack of feed and the great number of animals that had died, permission to graze the communal forests. This forest, under the *sénatus* law, fell under the ownership of the *djemâa*, but clearly the exclusionary regime had been extended to the commons, blocking peasant access to what was in principle their own property.[69]

By September 1949, after four years of attrition, the *djemâa* made an official complaint against the forest guards, especially Victor Bouilloux, for acting in an irregular and oppressive manner in blocking access to the forest. The CM administrator of Braz asked the head of the forestry service in Ténès to carry out an investigation. In response the inspector strongly defended his men, claimed they had always acted in a proper way, and noted that, ever since the appointment of the *caid*, they had become the target of hostility by the entire population. The *caid*, he claimed, had fallen under the influence of the *djemâa*, and in particular of four troublemakers, 'all of them habitual forest delinquents', the president Moussaoui, M'Hamed Aklouch, Mohamed Sakhi, and Benaouda Attaf, on behalf of whom the *caid* had interceded to stop prosecution by the forest guards.[70]

During the investigation Victor Bouillot described in his defence a confrontation with the *caid* that sheds a fascinating light on the ritualistic conflict between the peasants and forest guards. Bouillot reported how the *caid*, his brother, and the field guard (*garde champêtre*), returning from market, rode straight past him and a team of workers that were repairing a track, without any salutation. Bouillot informed the guard that he wished to question him about a forest infraction, but the *caid* told his assistant to continue riding past until the group pulled up some 150 metres further down the track. This behaviour, in a society of honour, could be read as an insult, and the two sides quickly moved into a ritualistic

[67] The files for the CM des Braz, under 'délits forestières', AOM 91301/20, 91301/161 and/162, are particularly rich on forest disputes.

[68] AOM 91301/53.; Moussaoui consolidated his grip on Zouggara in the *djemâa* elections of 1947, see the Communist weekly, *Liberté*, 27 November 1947.

[69] AOM 91301/61; the neighbouring *djemâa* of the *douar* Tacheta passed a similar resolution on 16 November 1945.

[70] All four are on the list of nine men who were elected to the *djemâa* on 21 September 1945.

confrontation. In the following face-off Bouillot insisted that he would not move closer to the *caids* group, but that the guard should ride back to answer his questions. The *caid* then rode, claimed Baillot, towards him in a rage, gesticulating wildly and shouting that the forest guard was an ignorant man who had never attended a French school. In this inversion of the usual colonial pecking order the *caid* was laying claim to a superior knowledge of French law and the forest codes than the guards themselves. The forest inspector in turn accused the *caid* of ignorance of the law and of misleading the people.

The three forest guards who inhabited fortified lodges in the *douar* Tacheta were all Europeans, the only *colons* with whom the forest inhabitants had a regular contact, a fact that made them the most concrete, and hated, symbol of the colonial order. The guards, as officers of the French state, were intensely aware of the psychological need not to lose face before the peasants, and to punish, as the native code had allowed until 1927, any sign of Algerian 'insulence' or 'arrogance'.[71] Bouillon was particularly mortified that the *caid* had acted out this insulting scene in the presence of forty peasants working on the road gang, a fact that could only serve to undermine the authority of the French administration. Such theatrical displays of public insult and humiliation played out before an Algerian audience seem to have increased markedly after the mid-1940s, an indication of the extent to which the mental chains of colonial hegemony were losing their grip in rural society.

In a second case of forest tensions, the inspector of the forestry service in Miliana wrote in 1949 to his head office in Algiers in response to a petition from the isolated *douar* of Bou Maad. The inspector explained how necessary it was, because of the extremely accidented nature of the mountains, to protect the forest through DRS terracing to prevent massive erosion and loss of soil.[72] Forest guards had been unable to prevent illicit charcoal burning since the culprits used a system of lookouts and, he said, 'it is very difficult to catch the delinquent near his charcoal fires, even by deploying every possible ruse and increasing the tours of inspection'.[73] The response of the forestry service was to introduce a complex system of permits (*permis de colportage*) that charcoal burners had to apply for in advance in the township of Littré but, since these were valid for only three days, the peasants of Bou Maad complained, they had to constantly reapply at the distant bureau. This was typical of the complicated, costly, and time-consuming

[71] See S. Thénault, *Violence ordinaire*, 63–4, on this dynamic.

[72] BNF NAF 28481, Germaine Tillion, in her diary (*carnets de mission*, no. 10), visited Bou Maad in early 1955 when she described,'A miserable region where the people survive only from illegal charcoal burning and collecting acorns. No cultivation, no animal husbandry, a few illegal goats.'

[73] AOM 91301/20. In another report of October 1953 the forestry service complained that repeated tours of inspection into the forest of El Hammam had found thirteen charcoal pits burning, but had been unable to arrest a single person because of the lookout system, although the main culprit, from the Bouamrane family in the notorious fraction of Bahara, was known to them.

bureaucratic regulations that drove the peasants to despair and to harbour a burning resentment of the forestry service.[74]

During the decade 1944 to 1954 the constant, low-key battle of the mountain peasants against the forestry service equipped them with clandestine techniques of resistance that were later readily redeployed in support of the FLN guerrilla forces. Louis Kergoat, who lived in the isolated forests of the Djebel Bissa just to the north of Zouggara during 1954 to 1958, witnessed this transition. New regulations of 1945 were intended to introduce a more liberal forest regime, but peasants seeking permission to make clearances for cultivation had to make a hundred kilometre round journey on foot to the bureaux of the *Eaux et Forêts* in Ténès where petty functionaries offered endless delays or told them to return another day. Ahmed Chaibi, a strong and violent man, described by Kergoat as a 'bandit', undertook illegal forest clearances in 1955, only to see the intervention of the combined force of the local road engineer, the forest guard, the gendarmes, *caid*, and *garde champêtre*. One night a band of men attacked the pound in which the forest guard of Bissa was holding their cattle for illegal grazing. The peasants, notes Kergoat, regarded the forest as belonging to them, and the rebellious Ahmed Chaibi was soon to join the ALN maquis, where he later died in combat.[75] The charcoal traders of the Dahra and Ouarsenis, with an expert knowledge of every mule track and how to avoid the forest guards when moving goods down to Miliana, Affreville, Duperré, and elsewhere, later filtered past army blockades when supplying food and goods to the maquis.[76] Similarly, the peasant system of placing lookouts and sending warning signals on the detection of forest guards was quickly adapted after 1954 to track the movements of army units as they penetrated the mountains.[77]

While peasants in the Chelif between 1845 and 1954 offered little direct or overt challenge to the colonial order they still entertained, well before the penetration of modern forms of nationalist ideology, a deep and continuous millenarian dream of liberation from French domination. Rural identity was fundamentally religious,

[74] AOM 91301/20 has a wealth of information on the regulatory system, including elaborate registers that listed every individual peasant, the number of cattle, sheep, and goats he was allowed to graze, and the fees charged.

[75] Louis Kergoat, 'Paysannerie des Djebels. Le travail dans le "Ferqa". La Ferqa «Bougraba» du Douar «Sinfita»'. Mémoire, école ppratique des hautes études, Paris (1969), 85, 89–90; and 'Paysan au Dahra Oriental (Algérie) Djebel Bissa. Contributions à la connaissance de la condition paysanne en montagne forestière (Essai socio-historique)', thesis École pratique des hautes études (1972), 201, 265.

[76] AOM 9140/152 An intelligence report of 16 June 1958 noted how supplies were reaching the maquis near Teniet el Haad: 'A not inconsiderable quantity of foodstuffs is carried almost daily to the *douar* Meddad by these charcoal traders'.

[77] Jean Servier, *Dans l'Aurès sur les Pas des Rebelles* (Paris: Édition France-Empire, 1955), 35–46, recounts how, during his first ethnological field trip from Miliana into the Zaccar in 1949, the fraction headmen used a number of ploys to prevent him visiting their fraction. He heard the 'Arab telephone' at work as warning messages were shouted ahead from one crest to another, 'O men of the *Djemâa*, here is a "Jackal" (the nick name for all French officials in the *bled*). He will arrive on foot: show a united front.'

that of the Muslim who shared in a community of the faithful (*umma*) that stood in opposition to that of the European un-believers (*roumi*). The dream of the peasantry was one of the eventual departure of the French, in some indefinable future, the casting off of forest guards and other oppressors, and the restoration of all lost lands and forests to the Algerian people. In the marketplace and Arab cafés mendicant poets and singers improvised stories of epic ancestral battles against the French and, according to Joseph Desparmet who recorded them in the 1930s, salved the humiliation of the French conquest and served 'to galvanize the national pride' and 'to keep alive in the soul of the people the hope and certainty of its inevitable and imminent liberation'.[78]

This messianic oral tradition reinforced or combined with the forms of popular nationalism that spread in the Chelif region during the late 1940s when Messali Hadj, the great leader (*zaim*), assumed a charismatic aura. During an annual religious feast (*moussem*) at Carnot in the mid-Chelif valley in September 1947, the police reported that, 'the itinerant singer Cheikh Lakhdar Tiarti has sung poems praising Messali "El Moudjahid" (he who engages in a Holy War). At the end of the "Fatiha" [Koranic prayer] he said, "Lift your hands to the heavens and recite: That God make the Muslims victorious over the *Roumis* [infidels]—that Allah protect Messali, the defender of Islam—join his party and you will win your freedom"'.[79]

This proto-nationalist vision was transmitted into the family cell, and passed from one generation to another, especially by women, the guardians of tradition. Mohammed Harbi recalls receiving the elements of 'our national history' from his mother, from whom he learned songs against the conscription of the First World War.[80] The mother of Abdelkader Klouch, who had migrated from the piedmont *douar* of Beni Rached in the Dahra, an epicentre of the 1916 anti-conscription revolt, to the *bidonville* of Bocca Sahnoune, sung to her son the declaration of war by the German Emperor, William II, ally of the Turkish caliphate.[81] The infidels

[78] Joseph Desparmet, 'Les réactions nationalitaires en Algérie', *Bulletin de la Société de géographies d'Alger et de l'Afrique du Nord* 130 (1932), 173–84, and 132 (1932), 437–56; Ahmed Koulakssis and Gilbert Meynier, *L'Émir Khaled. Premier Za'îm? Identité algérienne et colonialisme français* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), 18–22.

[79] AOM 4i197, intelligence report, 18 September 1947.

[80] M. Harbi, *Une vie. Mémoires politiques*, Vol. 1: *1945–1962* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 10–11; also Sadek Hadjerès, *Quand une nation s'éveille*, 44. In Maghrebi culture mothers were particularly close to their sons, not the more distant father, and traditionally women lamented in song or verse the departure of sons into emigration, the army, or incarceration, and during the Algerian War played a major role in demonstrations outside prisons.

[81] See André Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien, 1914–1954* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962), 21–9, on the anti-conscription movement and popular songs in praise of the German Emperor:

Greetings to William
Who ascends by aeroplane
And battles with the stars
Where are you going, O Roumi,
O man full of sorrow?

(*roumi*), warned the song, had signed orders to seize 'our children', and the country was in flames. This illiterate woman from a peasant background, in her various fireside stories, conveyed an almost visceral sense of the otherness of the French: for her 'the roumi always had blue eyes, a shock of hair, was well-fed, and smelled of pipe tobacco and petrol fumes'.[82]

The oral tradition did not relate only to a distant and mythical heroic past, such as the battles of Abdelkader in the 1830s or the Mokrani revolt of 1871, but also to relatively recent historic events so that peasant memory was grounded in a quite recent, lived experience. Particularly intense in the local memory was the precise recall of particular family fields or communal and forest rights that had been lost to European colonization, and this fuelled a bitter resentment that was passed from father to son.[83] Mostefa Lacheraf rightly identified the deep continuity in this underground anti-French tradition. Peasant millenarianism constituted a permanent strata of resistance, a potentiality that, given the right conditions, was ready to surge into mass insurrection.

An early occasion of such a coalescence between anti-colonial political ideologies and the pre-existing traditions of peasant resistance dates from 1932 when the French Communist Party (PCF), under Comintern direction, sent Paul Radiguet to reorganize the Algerian region. The Radiguet mission only lasted a few months but is of particular interest since it provides detailed evidence of an early attempt by communists to organize outside the urban centres and to make direct contact with the inhabitants of a mountain zone. Radiguet travelled into the Blida Atlas, an eastern extension of the Ouarsenis massif, where peasants had been engaged since 1912 in a twenty-year battle against expropriation of forests in the *douars* Oued Abarar, Ghellai, and Sidi el Kebir.[84] Radiguet was surprised to find that seemingly backward peasants were already organized so effectively through the *djemâas*. It was the Atlas peasants that took the initiative in inviting Radiguet, 'to hold meetings in the mountains, small gatherings organized by the peasants themselves during which our comrades discussed in the simplest possible terms our demands, the slogans, the types of collective struggle, and forms of organisation'.[85]

[82] Interview with Abdelkader Klouch, Chlef (formerly Orleansville), 20 November 2014. Mr Klouch remarked that this oral tradition reminded the Algerian people how in a way ('*confusement*') they remained occupied and a sense of national identity or unity emerged through opposition to the French.

[83] Michel Launay, *Paysans algériens. Paysans, la vigne, et les hommes* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), 132, recounts how the peasants of Oranie recalled with astonishing precision the location and dimension of parcels of land lost to *colons*.

[84] Paul Radiguet, 'Les paysans d'Algérie en lutte contre les expropriations', *Cahiers du bolchévisme* 8 (1933), 576–82. Allison Drew, *We Are No Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), ch. 3, 'The Mountain "Was Going Communist": Peasant Struggles on the Mitidja', 56–80, throws new light on the Radiguet mission from materials in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow), including letters and reports to the central colonial section.

[85] P. Radiguet, 'Les paysans', 578.

The communist deputy Lucien Montjauvis, who attended a major anti-expropriation demonstration of seven hundred men in Blida on 22 December 1932, was equally surprised by mountain peasants who openly asked him if they should take up arms.[86] They appeared not to be cowed by the police, *caids*, or informers, and Radiguet reported the peasants were unmoved by the threat of arrest: 'The peasants are so enthusiastic that they come up to us in the city streets, follow us and hassle us to hold delegate meetings'.[87] But eventually a heavy police intervention clamped down on the communists and even the deputy Montjauvis was arrested briefly, while Radiguet and Rafa Naceur were held for a week in the grim prison of Serkadji.

The events in Blida point towards the radical potential for de-sectorization where two relatively autonomous movements, one urban the other rural, made a connection.[88] The colonial authorities were always fearful of precisely such an eventuality and the *commune mixte* provided the main system of indirect rule through which the colonial state monitored and policed the rural masses. The *caids* were in the front line of what Martin Thomas has called the colonial 'intelligence state', an apparatus of imperial control of vast rural territories in which keeping the finger on the pulse of native opinion was dependent on collecting, centralizing, and analysing a mass of data on the rural economy and politics.[89] It is to this system that we turn next.

[86] A. Drew, *We Are No Longer*, 64; the incident is also mentioned by O. Carlier, *Entre nation*, 121.
[87] A. Drew, *We Are No Longer*, 65.
[88] On de-sectorization, see John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: CUP, 2016), 31–2.
[89] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*.

3
The *caids* and the *commune mixte* System

The nationalists and communists, in seeking to penetrate and radicalize the *douars* of the interior, found themselves confronted not only by the forest guards and gendarmerie, but most significantly by the administration of the *commune mixte*, the key colonial organization for the policing and control of peasant society from *c*.1868 to 1956.[1] The *sénatus-consulte* laws of April and May 1863 broke up the tribes and replaced them by the *douar*-commune that was intended to serve a transitional function in the assimilation of the Algerian rural population into a French municipal system. This transformation, in spite of a reform phase during 1944 to 1948, was not to come about until after 1956 so that a 'temporary' system of rural government survived for some eighty years.[2]

The seventy-eight *communes mixtes*, vast rural zones, which covered 80 per cent of the land surface of northern Algeria (the Tell), and over 70 per cent of the Algerian population, fell under the control of European administrators.[3] The administrator occupied a bureaux in an urban centre from where, with a small team of deputies, secretaries, interpreters, drivers, armed guards, or cavalrymen, he oversaw the economy, security, civil registration, taxation, and conscription of the surrounding countryside, and reported to the sub-prefect of the *arrondissements*. For example, the particularly extensive *commune mixte* of the Chelif, which was administered from a bureaux in Orleansville, covered twenty-six *douars* that spanned the foothills of the Dahra and the Ouarsenis (see Map 3).[4]

The corps of the CM administrators had a wider political and ideological importance since it was the recruiting ground for senior officials and government

[1] The inventory of the CM archives, which is an ongoing process in Aix-en-Provence (AOM), is now opening the way to research on colonial rural society at the local level; see, for example, the work of Christine Mussard, 'Archéologie d'un territoire de colonisation en Algérie. La commune mixte de La Calle, 1884–1957', doctoral thesis, University of Aix-Marseille, 2012; and 'Produite un centre de colonisation en commune mixte: décideurs et usagers en prise avec la création d'un territoire. Le cas du Tarf (commune mixte de La Calle)', in Didier Guignard and V. Vanessa Guéno (eds), *Les acteurs des transformations foncières autour de la Méditerranée au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), 95–114.

[2] On the CM system and the *caids*, see Claude Collot, *Les institutions de l'Algérie durant la période coloniale (1830–1962)* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1987), 87–136; C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans*, 1.129–200; Maxime Champ, *La commune mixte d'Algérie* (Algiers: Minerva, 1928).

[3] Anon., *Les communes mixtes et le gouvernement des indigènes en Algérie* (Paris: Augustin Challamel, 1897), 8, the CM represented 82 per cent of the Tell and 75 per cent of the Algerian population.

[4] The sub-prefect of Orleanville, before the 1956 reorganization as a prefecture, administered the *arrondissements* of Orleansvilles that included the CMs of Chelif and Ténès, while to the east the sub-prefect of Miliana administered the four CMs of Les Braz, Djendel, Teniet el Haad, and Sersou.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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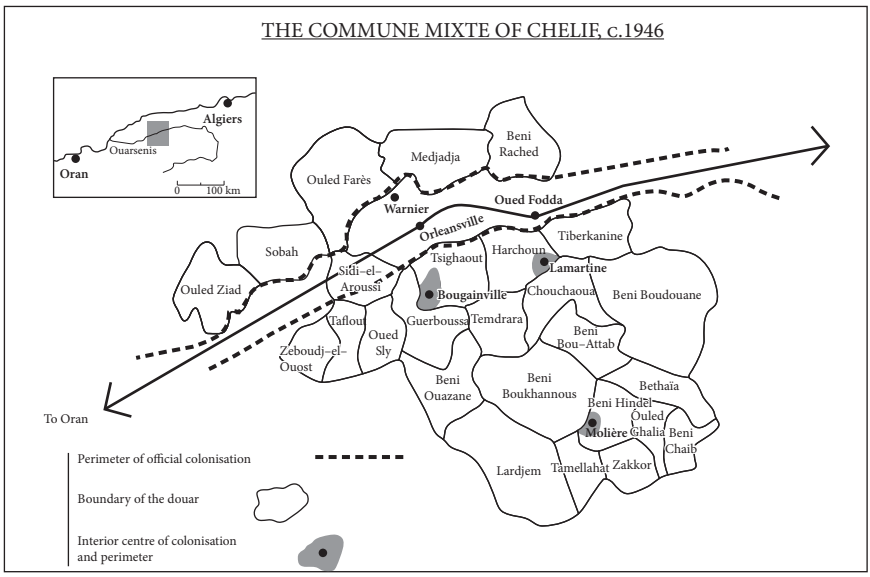

Map 3 The *commune mixte* of Chelif, *c.*1946, indicating the twenty-six *douars* located both north of the Chelif valley, and to the south in the Ouarsenis.

advisers in the Native Affairs department (*Affaires indigènes*) and the Governor General's cabinet, exercising a key influence on colonial policy in relation to rural Algeria and labour migration to France.[5]

In 1946 the administrator, Julien Rohrbacher, from his desk in Orleansville, controlled a huge territory of 3,168 square kilometres, equivalent in area to an English county or a French department. A small population of 574 Europeans was concentrated in the seven small townships of Lamartine, Bougainville, Warnier, Malakoff, Masséna, Molière, and Bou Caid, while outside the perimeter in the twenty-six *douars* there were only seventy-seven Europeans living in fortified farmhouses, massively outnumbered by 127,792 Algerians (Table 1).[6] Each *douar*, which had an average population of 4,915, was administered locally by the *caid*, who was assisted by the headmen (*kebirs*) from each fraction, and, often in opposition to him, an elected *djemâa* of delegates under their president.[7]

[5] See Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism: Algerians in France, 1900–62* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 134–43, 154–8, 184–8, on the role of Octave Depont, Adolphe Gérolami, Pierre Godin, Augustin Berque, and others who had all started their careers as CM administrators.

[6] AOM 1Y113, *plan d'action communale* (PAC) report 'Habitat', 9 August 1946.

[7] Each *douar* was further subdivided into the small community of the sub-tribal fraction (or '*bocca*'). The larger *douars* like the Beni Boudaoune and Beni Boukhanous contained twenty to twenty-four fractions, the smaller ones like Beni Bou Attab and Ouled Ghalia contained four to six fractions. The average population of each of the 291 fractions in the CM was 439.

Table 1 Population of the *douars* and fractions in the *commune mixte* of Chelif *c.*1946.

Douar	Population (Algerian)	Number of fractions	Average population of fraction
Beni Bouattab	2,797	4	699
Beni Boudaoune	8,183	24	341
Beni Boukhanous	9,010	20	451
Beni Chaib	3,533	10	353
Beni Hindel	5,574	12	465
Beni Ouazane	6,359	14	454
Beni Rached	7,039	12	587
Bethaia	5,968	12	497
Chouchaoua	3,574	8	447
Guerboussa	5,561	13	428
Harchoum	3,867	9	430
Lardjem	7,512	12	626
Medinet Medjadja	8,513	20	426
Ouled Farès	7,794	20	390
Ouled Ghalia	2,834	5	567
Ouled Ziad	4,090	11	372
Sidi Larouissi	2,712	9	301
Sly	2,290	9	254
Sobha	5,849	8	731
Taflout	2,583	6	431
Tamellahat	2,668	8	334
Temdrara	3,869	6	645
Tiberkanine	5,607	13	431
Tsighaout	3,973	10	397
Zakkor	3,463	12	289
Zeboudj el Oust	2,530	4	633
Total	127,792	291	439

In the 1940s CM administrators in the Chelif region looked back with nostalgia to the time when they had routinely gone on horseback on tours of inspection, slept under canvas, and gleaned sound intelligence through contact with the peasants of the interior (cf. Photo 1). However, by the late 1940s it had become impossible for administrators like Rohrbacher, desk-bound bureaucrats overwhelmed by paperwork, to retain direct surveillance of the *douars*.[8]

The lack of direct contact by European administrators with the peasant population, the retreat into an urban office, was symptomatic of a broader change, a declining *pieds-noirs* presence and inter-ethnic contact as official colonization ground to a halt after 1900 and went into reverse as growing numbers of 'pioneer' colons deserted their isolated farms for the comfort and security of the towns.

[8] Manuel Bugéja, *Souvenirs d'un fonctionnaire colonial: 34 ans d'administration algérienne: au service de la plus grande France* (Tangiers: Les Éditions internationales, 1939), 16, 64, 129, 137, administrator in the Ouarsenis, on his horseback inspections during 1893–1905; J. Servier, *Dans l'Aurès*, 35, on the regrets of the administrator of Miliana in 1949 on the passing of the traditional tours of inspection.

Photo 1 Group photograph of the *commune mixte* administration of Ténès, on the steps of the bureaux. Date unknown.
Copyright Daniel Mansion.

During the Algerian War the counterintelligence specialist David Galula ascribed the catastrophic failure of the CM administrators to gather intelligence on the isolated mountainous regions to the replacement of the horse by the automobile and the fact that thousands of peasants never saw a European official.[9]

The lack of close, direct contact with the interior, highlights the degree to which the CM administrator was dependent on a system of indirect rule, and in particular on the *caids*. The *caids*, as the key agents of the state, were to play a crucial role in the way the late colonial regime extended its authority over the interior, and, as we will argue, an understanding of the deepening crisis of this system after the First World War provides a key to the loss of political control in the *douars* and the eventual transition into widespread armed rebellion.

The *caids*, neo-tribal chiefs that often went on horseback dressed in a red cape, turban, and leather boots, and armed with a pistol, represented the lowest rung of the official colonial hierarchy, an administrative jack-of-all trades delegated with

[9] David Galula, *Pacification in Algeria, 1956–1958* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, [1963], 2006 edn), 37, available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG478-1.html. This retreat of the colonial state from the *bled* was marked by the disappearance of an older generation of 'frontiersmen' that had lived in close contact with peasants and spoke Kabyle or Arab dialect. For a fine study of such a liminal figure, see Fanny Colonna, *Le meunier, les moines et le bandit. Des vies quotidiennes dans l'Aurès (Algérie) du XXe siècle* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010).

an enormous range of tasks, from updating the civil, electoral, tax, gun, and conscript registers to investigating crimes and raising corvée labour to fight forest fires and locust invasions and to repair roads. The *caid* had a duty to keep the administrator informed of the economic situation, from the state of crops to wage levels, as well as the changing state of public opinion, the response to news or rumours, and to detect any glimmering of religious or political unrest. The *caids* were thus in the front line of the colonial intelligence state, in which imperial control of vast rural territories, and keeping the finger on the pulse of native opinion, was dependent on collecting, centralizing, and analysing a mass of data, from changing food prices to harvest conditions and resistance to tax collection.

Colette Establet, in a brilliant study of the Nemenchas region, shows through an analysis of the daily correspondence between the *caids* and the military commander in Tebessa how over a period of twenty years (1872–96) the number of letters increased rapidly and changed from an 'archaic' Arab style to assume a standardized, bureaucratic form in which a tribal culture of patrimonialism was replaced by a new conception of power based on the rule of an impersonal law.[10] This dramatic shift in the later nineteenth century can be linked to an important turning point in the 1880s as the colonial regime expanded the apparatus of modern state power into the interior of Algeria, a project to identify, name, and register every individual and to fix them into a web of controls relating to taxation, property rights, conscription, criminal records, and pass laws.[11] The coercive power of the administrator and *caids* was simultaneously reinforced by the notorious native code or *code de l'indigénat*.[12]

The archives of the *communes mixtes* that are currently being inventoried at Aix are beginning to reveal the considerable volume of documents generated by the *caids* and their clerks (*khodjas*) and the extent to which these widely dispersed agents communicated almost daily by post, telegraph, and telephone with the urban-based administrators.[13] Contrary to the claim made by the governor

[10] Colette Establet, *Être caid dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Édition CNRS, 1991), for all their colourful 'tribal' appearance, the caids were increasingly transformed into a class of state functionaries.

[11] A key indicator was the law of 23 March 1882 that introduced civil registration of all Algerians and forced them to be renamed; see C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans*, 1.176–83. The sedentarization of nomadic population discussed above (Chapter 2) was linked to this broader process of state building.

[12] On the code of 28 June 1881, see G. Prévot-Leygonnie, 'Les pouvoirs disciplinaires des administrateurs de commune mixtes en Algérie', *Revue algérienne et tunisienne de législation et de jurisprudence* (1890), 81–115; Sylvie Thénault, 'Le "code de l'indigénat"', in Abderrahmane Bouchène et al. (eds), *Histoire de l'Algérie à la période coloniale (1830–1962)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2012), 200–6, and *Violence ordinaire*; Isabelle Merle, 'De la «légalisation» de la violence en contexte colonial. Le régime de l'indigénat en question', *Politix* 17.66 (2004), 137–62; on the code in French West Africa, Gregory Mann, 'What Was the Indigénat? The "Empire of Law" in French West Africa', *Journal of African History* 50 (2009), 331–53.

[13] On the modernization of the postal service in rural Algeria, see Annick Lacroix, 'Une histoire sociale et spatiale de l'état dans l'Algérie colonisée. L'administration des postes, télégraphes et telephones du milieu du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre mondiale', doctoral thesis, École Normale Supérieure de Cachan, 2014.

Jacques Soustelle in 1955, and widely echoed by historians, that mountainous regions were '*sous-administrée*', we find that the CM system was groaning under the weight of an avalanche of paper.[14] Whether that bureaucracy was efficient in gathering intelligence is another matter, as is to be seen.

The complexity of the CM system mirrored a tension at the heart of the colonial regime. Between the 1930s and 1950s colonial policy was caught between two poles: on the one hand, liberal or technocratic reformers were committed to a programme of economic modernization, a developmental agenda that could only work through some degree of local government reform that would sweep away the *communes mixtes* and *caids*, and replace them with a rational, bureaucratic order modelled on that of the metropolitan commune. But this agenda was incompatible with the system of indirect rule of the rural interior, managed by the *Affaires algériennes*, which depended on, and reinforced, a patrimonial system. This model was one in which the *caids* were encouraged to retain their vital control over their peasant 'constituents' through the reinforcement of pseudo-tribal power, authoritarian and patriarchal relations that were based on vertical solidarities of a clan-like nature. In exchange for their loyalty *caids*, and in particular the aristocracy (*grandes familles*) that regulated elections, were rewarded by the colonial state through a plethora of honours, cash, and promotions.

Establet's study suggests that by the turn of the century the *caidat* was fast being transformed into a corps of state functionaries, but evidence from the Chelif shows that such a change had stalled and was even reversed after 1900. The *caids* required a minimal level of education to be able to cope efficiently with the volume of paper work confronting them, but as late as 1913 some 80 per cent of *caids* were illiterate and lacked even the most elementary knowledge of the administrative system.[15] The Algerian government attempted through a series of measures (1919, 1939, 1947) to convert the *caids* into a body of efficient state functionaries through funding the college education of their sons, introducing entrance examinations, a one-year apprenticeship programme, and the creation of a professional corps complete with a fixed pay scale, pensions, and conditions of service.[16] However, the reforms largely failed or were neutralized, since conservative forces in the Algiers government remained wedded to a counter-strategy, the preservation of a 'neo-tribal' system of administration that reinforced the patrimonial power of the so-called *grandes familles*. This created a hybrid form of rural governance, a peculiar mix of traditionalism and modernity, that was to carry

[14] C. Establet, *Être caid*, 348–9, estimates that the number of state functionaries per 1,000 individuals in rural Algeria (*caids*, *kebirs*, *garde champêtres*, *khodjas* . . .) was similar to that of France. 'The region [Nemenchas], far distant from the centres of colonization, does not appear to have been lacking in administration, far from it.'

[15] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 124.

[16] On failed attempts to change the caidat into a professional corps, see C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 128–30; C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmanes*, 2.639–41.

major, long-term implications for the failure of economic and political reform, the spread of nationalism, and the rapid collapse of the CM system after 1954.

The *grandes familles*: The Revival of a Neo-tribal Élite in the Chelif

During the period from the First World War to the 1954 insurrection the *caids* in the Chelif, as in Algerian in general, were recruited either from aristocratic families that dated their lineage to the pre-conquest era or from a dynamic class of relatively well-to-do, entrepreneurial or 'middle' peasants that seized on the same opportunities offered to European settlers by the *sénatus* laws to accumulate land and property.[17] Augustin Berque, one of the best informed observers of Algerian society, estimated that of 721 *caids* in 1938, some 40 per cent were recruited from the traditional aristocracy, the warrior caste (*djouads*), and the religious or *marabout* lineages (*cheufas*), while the remaining 60 per cent were from the small rural bourgeoisie that had emerged as a new class since the late nineteenth century.[18]

The latter, the strata of relatively well-to-do peasants, often described by the Chelif administrators as '*fellahs aisés*', succeeded in raising credit, buying up land, and engaged in a degree of agrarian modernization. They typically owned farms of 50 to 100 hectares, inhabited large, stone-built farmhouses, and by the late 1940s often possessed a car or van, and branched out into entrepreneurial activities such as cattle dealing, and investment in Arab cafés, grocery stores, flour mills, and small-scale money lending.[19] The rural bourgeoisie or 'middle peasantry', located as it was in a strategic position in the piedmont, was able to bridge between the urban world of the developed plain, and the peasant masses of the mountainous interior, and came to play a crucial role in the diffusion of nationalism into the interior.[20]

[17] The term '*grandes familles*' or '*grandes tentes*' was used by contemporaries to refer to the old, élite families that had survived from the Turkish period. The anthropologist Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 291–2, defined the 'middle peasantry', as a conservative class that had the relative wealth and education, a 'tactical freedom', to enable them to organize resistance to powerful landowners and the state, and to transmit 'urban unrest and political ideas' to the rural masses, as such it was to play a crucial role in the leadership of the FLN in the Chelif.

[18] J. Berque (ed.), *Augustin Berque. Écrits*, 65. Augustin, father of the renowned sociologist Jacques Berque, was director of the *Affaires algériennes* from 1940 to 1945. Gérard Bergé, in a CHEAM essay of 1953, 'Caids et élus en Algérie', ANP 20000046/82, estimated the true aristocratic '*grandes familles*' at 25 per cent of *caids*, and the class of 'parvenus' that had risen from the commoner ranks at 75 per cent.

[19] See Ahmed Henni, 'La naissance d'une classe moyenne paysanne musulmane après la Première Guerre mondiale', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 83.311 (1996), 47–63.

[20] Karen Pfeifer, 'The Development of Commercial Agriculture in Algeria, 1830–1970', in Paul Uselding (ed.), *Research in Economic History* 10 (1986), 271–308, estimates that the new rural bourgeoisie constituted about 10 percent of the rural population in the Chelif by 1950. 'They moved

Historians and nationalists have, in general, depicted the Algerian peasantry as a simple, homogeneous block, but there existed significant internal differences, economic and political gradations, that divided the class of subsistence farmers. Of particular interest was the strata that can, following the anthropologist Eric Wolf, be designated as a 'middle peasantry'. Wolf, in his comparative study of modern peasant revolutions, developed the influential theory that poor peasants lacked the means, the 'tactical power', to engage in rebellion, unless they were assisted by an external force that proved capable of challenging and destroying the dominant state. Such political leverage existed among the middle peasants that owned sufficient land and resources, a degree of economic independence, that enabled them to exercise the 'minimal tactical freedom' required to challenge powerful landlords and the state.[21] This led to what Wolf describes as a 'curious paradox', the fact that the class of peasants that sociologists have tended to see as the main bearers of a peasant tradition also provided the leadership for rural revolt: 'it is precisely this culturally conservative stratum which is the most instrumental in dynamiting the peasant social order.'[22] This paradoxical strata, that played such a key leadership role in the spread of nationalism into the mountainous interior of the Chelif, possessed a political culture that mixed elements of traditionalism and economic modernization.

As will be seen later, middle peasant families in the Chelif such as those of Djilali Belhadj, Mohammed Bentaieb, the *bachaga* Boualam, and Mohamed Zitoufi, while still embedded in the cultural and social universe of the peasantry, aspired to rise into the ranks of the local administration since this offered the best opportunity to extend their economic and political power through access to the resources of the colonial state. These rich, ambitious, but socially conservative peasants increasingly sought to educate their sons in French schools or military academies so as to gain their nomination to the *caidat*.[23] Some succeeded and, in doing so, attempted to conceal their 'commoner' origins and to reinvent themselves as of ancient aristocratic or *marabout* descent, and modelled their behaviour on that of the *grandes familles*. If successful most of these *caids* became

easily between the rural and urban milieus, unifying them, and between their native compatriots and their European counterparts, serving as translators and mediators between the two societies.'

[21] Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 291; also Wolf, 'On Peasant Rebellions' (1969), reprinted in Teodore Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 264–74. Wolf drew on the work of Hamza Alavi, 'Peasants and Revolution', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds), *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1965), 241–77. For a critique of Wolf, see Neil Charlesworth, 'The "Middle Peasant Thesis" and the Roots of Rural Agitation in India, 1914–1947', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 7.3 (1980), 259–80; Tom Brass, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 153–66.

[22] E. C. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 292.

[23] F. Colonna, *Savants paysans*, 223–38; she quotes from Chérif Benhabyles, *L'Algérie française vue par un indigène* (Algiers: Impr. orientale Fontana freres 1914): 'The peasant who owns a hundred hectares of land and has a sole child will not make him a farmer but, whether he likes it or not, will send him to school and compel him to become a functionary such as a *douar* field-guard.'

staunch loyalists and agents of the French state, but many middle peasants lost out in the competition for office to the powerful *grandes familles* that monopolized access to the *caidat*. After 1945 some senior administrators became concerned that the conversion of the 'parvenu', self-proclaimed '*grandes familles*' into an almost hereditary caste meant that their sons automatically won nomination to the *caidat*, although many were of poor ability and absentees who simply milked the *douar* for its resources. This monopoly was threatening to alienate the able sons of the middle peasantry, who unable to gain access to the *caidat*, moved into political opposition to the dominant *grandes familles* in so-called *çof* wars, factional local power struggles between family coalitions, and in doing so tended to take a leading role in anti-colonial movements.[24]

The rest of this chapter is concerned mainly with the extended family or clan networks of the aristocracy that remained dominant in the rural politics of the Chelif until 1954, and offered the main bulwark against the penetration of radical movements into the *douars*. The patrimonial and political culture that remained dominant among the ancient families also served as a model for a fraction of the entrepreneurial middle peasants, parvenus that assumed the lifestyle, and claimed the 'hereditary' status and designation, of a '*grandes familles*'. As we will see later the penetration of communism and nationalism into the Chelif countryside after 1944 saw a deepening split between a grouping of pro-French aristocratic and 'administrative' middle peasant *caids*, and an excluded, anti-colonial grouping that moved into the oppositional camp of the elected *djemâas*.

It was long thought by historians that the precolonial aristocracy, the great tribal leaders, after a long war of brutal conquest, had been definitively destroyed by the *sénatus-consulte* of 1863 and the repression that followed the great revolt of Mokrani in 1871.[25] However, Peter von Sivers, among others, has shown how the once powerful families survived economic crisis through the late nineteenth century, to recover their fortunes after 1900.[26] This recovery was achieved through the ability of some aristocratic families to skilfully convert their traditional tribal

[24] G. Bergé, 'Caids et élus' CHEAM essay, ANP 20000046/82, noted this alienation of young men from more modest backgrounds unable to gain access to posts in the local CM system. Various reforms in 1929 and 1949 had attempted to transform *caid* recruitment through open competitive examinations, but by 1953 only fifteen *caids* out of over a thousand had passed through such professional training programmes.

[25] C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmanes*, 1.390–2, 'La decadence des grandes familles'.

[26] Peter Von Sivers, 'Insurrection and Accommodation: Indigenous Leadership in Eastern Algeria, 1840–1900', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6 (1975), 259–75. Despite massive change and dislocation down to the First World War, 'it was also a time of remarkable family continuity'. See also his 'Indigenous Administrators in Algeria, 1846–1914: Manipulation and Manipulators', *The Maghreb Review* 7.5–6 (1982), 116–21, in which he affirmed even more strongly that the traditional élite, far from being dismantled, survived 'vigorously' and the French administrative system was unable to function without these 'tenacious Algerian family networks'; see also Gilbert Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*, 203–10: 'The *grandes familles* kept their influence when they were skilful in adapting to economic and political turmoil.'

or religious authority into one that was based on the quite different foundations of the state *caidat*.

In 1894 the governor Jules Cambon, shocked by evidence of the disappearance of the great families, sought to reverse the policy of weakening the tribal aristocracy by reinforcing a neo-patrimonial élite as the key intermediaries in the indirect rule of peasant society.[27] From 1907 to 1945 a '*politique des chefs*' was managed from Algiers by the directors of the *Service des Affaires algériennes*, Arab scholars and specialists in Algerian law and society, who maintained intelligence files on the activities of the aristocracy, constantly tracked their shifting allegiances and the degree of their 'loyalism' towards France, and correspondingly punished or rewarded them by favours. A battery of techniques and levers was deployed to nurture selected families, among them a range of rewards, including the *Légions d'Honneur*, promotion to the *caidat* or the ranks of the honorary *aghas* or *bachagas*, financial assistance, grants of land, pensions, assisted passage to Mecca, and other perks, including the most important, their backing as official (or 'administrative') electoral candidates.[28]

The outstanding feature of the *grandes familles* during the twentieth century was their ability to develop strategies for the capture not of just one or two *caid* positions, as did the rural bourgeoisie, but multiple contiguous *douars* that they amalgamated into a single regional block over which they were able to exert a powerful political grip.[29] For example the *caids* of the clan headed by the aged patriarch Belkacem Ferhat, born in 1871, established its domination over thirteen *douars*, most of them located in the Ouarsenis centred on Teniet el Haad, and reaching into the rich cereal lands of the Sersou to the south.[30] Similarly, the central Chelif region was politically dominated by three families, the Saiah, Saiah-Benbouali, and Bouthiba that shared a common ancestry. Between 1944 and 1954 the Saiah, Bouthiba, and Benbouali occupied at least sixteen of the twenty-six

[27] C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmanes*, 1.518–19, Cambon told the Senate on 18 June 1894 that destruction of the grandes familles had sabotaged indirect rule by creating, 'a kind of human dust over which we have no influence.... We no longer have the official intermediaries placed between us and the native population'; C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 124–5.

[28] Between 1907 and 1945 the *Service des affaires indigènes* was headed by four successive directeurs, Dominique Luciani (1907–20), Jean Mirante (1920–35), Louis Milliot (1935–40), and Augustin Berque (1940–5); J. Bouveresse, *Délégations financières*, 1.964–5; Jean-Claude Vatin, 'Postface. Les parcours d'un observateur passioné', in J. Berque (ed.), *Augustin Berque*, 265–97.

[29] The most detailed investigation of this family strategy was carried out by Gérard Bergé in a CHEAM study, 'Caids et élus en Algérie', 26 October 1953, Archives nationales (Pierrefitte) (ANP), 20000046/82. His data showed that multiple nomination of *caids* could be found in about three-quarters of the CMs. In the department of Constantine, seven families had between five to ten *caids* each. In the CM of Mascara (Oranie) where Bergé appears to have been an administrator, two families carved up the region between them, the Hakiki family with four *caids* in the mountains and the Banchenane with four in the plain.

[30] Belkacem and his son Bentayeb Ferhat between them occupied the *caidat* of the *douars* Ighoud, El Meddad, Ben Naouri, and Doui Hasseni, making up half of the area of the CM of Teniet el Haad; G. Bergé, 'Caids et élus', notes that the Ferhat clan included thirteen *caids* spread over four or five CM.

douars in the CM of Chelif ensuring a hegemonic regulation of peasant society.[31] The strategy of each of the three family coalitions, which were sometimes in competition with each other, was to build up a power base through the amalgamation of particular groupings of adjacent *douars*, the Saiah in the piedmont north of Orleansville (the *douars* Ouled Farès, Medjadja, and Beni Rached), the Benbouali in the Ouarsenis piedmont south of Orleansville (Tsighaout, Guerboussa, Beni Ouazane, Temdrara, Beni Bou Attab), and the Bouthiba in the CM of Ténès (Beni Djerjen, Beni Merzoug, Heumis, Sinfita) and the Ouarsenis piedmont (Harchoun, Chouchaoua).[32]

The complex political changes taking place in the *grandes familles* and rural society between 1918 and 1954 can be tracked by a focus on these three clans, and in particular on the dominant, senior family of the Saiah and its leader Abdelkader Saiah who played a major political role at both the local and national level. This chapter looks first at the general features of the patrimonial system of rule by the Saiah during an earlier, stable phase from *c.*1918 to 1932, before turning to the deepening economic and political crisis faced by the *grandes familles* as they began to buckle under the mounting pressure of mass electoral politics and the surge in nationalism. The response of the aristocracy was to develop, with the support of the colonial government, a hybrid system in which the clan elders like Abdelkader, amalgamated conventional party politics centred in Algiers and Paris, with the manipulation of local electoral politics based on patrimonial, patron-client relationships. This hybrid system, despite French attempts to reform or abolish it at the end of the Second World War (see Chapter 5), endured down to the War of Independence, and played a key part in the failure of economic modernization and political reform that played a role in the precipitation of the 1954 insurrection.

At the time of the French conquest the great aristocratic families of the Chelif region enjoyed considerable charismatic and military power among the rural population. In 1847 General de Bourjolly described the extraordinary religious authority of the Khalifa Sidi El Aribi in the Chelif: 'In his manners a gentleman, his weapons glitter with gold and precious stones, and his equipment is also as elaborate as possible.' It was an arresting spectacle, reported the General, to see El Aribi's cavalcade approach when local tribesmen would rush to 'kiss his feet and, after paying this hommage, remained fixed in this position until he was lost from sight'.[33]

[31] Data on the Saiah based on AOM 4i206 and AOM 91/1K 1231. It is difficult to arrive at precise numbers of *caids* at any moment in time, since the Saiah frequently rotated from one *caidat* to another, or sometimes held two or more *douars* simultaneously.

[32] C. Establet, *Être caid*, 34–7, remarks on the presence of such strategies among the tribal leaders of the Nementchas as early as the 1860s: for example, Ahmed Chaouch dreamed of placing his sons at the head of every *caidat* in the Tabessa circle.

[33] Quoted by X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 1.317.

Although the CM administrator Rohrbacher reported that the influence of the religious confraternities was in decline by the 1940s, the Saiah and Benbouali retained a significant charismatic authority among the mountain people of the Dahra and Ouarsenis from the ancient seat of their power in the *douar* Medjadja. This major religious centre was located in a spectacular position, with numerous springs and orchards, on an escarpment high above the Chelif plain to the north-east of Orleansville. The ancestor of the Saiah family and the junior line of the Benbouali, Si Yidder, had emigrated from Andalusia and Morocco in the late fifteenth century, and thus carried the charisma of a descendent of the Prophet Mohammed and of a pure Arab lineage that claimed to be racially distinct from the mountain Berbers. In the sixteenth century his descendant the saintly Si Ahmed ben Abdallah was assassinated while praying in the mosque by a Turkish Bey, Ben Chekour, and this greatly increased the sanctity of Medjadja and the religious authority of the family throughout the region.[34]

In April and September of each year the peasants of the *douars* Guerboussa and Tsighaout, where the *caids* belonged to the junior line of the Saiah-Benbouali family, made the pilgrimage on foot from the northern fringes of the Ouarsenis across the Chelif River, up to the holy shrine of the martyr Si Ahmed ben Abdallah at Medjadja, the ancestral seat of the Saiah.[35] The cultivation of a populist religious base, to some extent in opposition to French secular values, was further reinforced by the creation of the lifestyle of a traditional tribal chief, symbolized both by elaborate dress and by the splendid horsemanship of an aristocratic élite. Such 'tribalism' had all the hallmarks of an 'invented tradition' that was artificially sustained or regenerated by the colonial state. In the Chelif region, as across Algeria, daily life was punctuated by an extraordinary round of ceremonials and parading marking annual commemorations, festivities, the funeral of dignitaries, important weddings, the visit of statesmen and other occasions from the Muslim calendar, during which the *caids*, with their armed retainers, turned out in force to provide a splendid cavalcade.[36]

Typical of such lavish ceremonies was that organized in Orleansville on the visit of the newly appointed Governor General, Abel, on 29 March 1920. After a grand reception in the sub-prefecture the Governor and his party went by car to the military training ground where two large marquis had been erected and Abel

[34] AOM 4i197, J. Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique*, CM du Chélif, 30 December 1952. On the Saiah family, see also X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 1.320–1; J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.688–90, 970.

[35] AOM 4i197, J. Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique*.

[36] On the role of exotic parades and ceremonials in the late imperial state, see Justin Willis, 'Tribal Gatherings: Colonial Spectacle, Native Administration and Local Government in Condominium Sudan', *Past and Present* 211 (2011), 243–68; Jocelyn Dakhlia, 'Pouvoir du parasol et pouvoirs nu. Un dépouillement islamique? Le cas de la royauté marocaine', *Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles* (2005), https://crcv.revues.org/233; Nicolas Courtin, 'La garde indigène à Madagascar. Une police pour la «splendeur» de l'État colonial (1896–1914)', in Jean-Pierre Bat and Nicolas Courtin (eds), *Maintenir l'ordre colonial* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 45–64.

proceeded to hand out the *Légion d'Honneur* to splendidly attired *caids*, members of the three dominant families, the Saiah, Benbouali, and Bouthiba. Abel, in recognition of the huge sacrifice of Algerian soldiers during the First World War, pronounced them as 'the representatives of the greatest families of the Chelif and Ouarsenis; their fathers had always served France and they, during the last war, had proved their devotion and loyalty'.[37] The award ceremony ended with a traditional horseback charge and firing of guns, 'a magnificent *fantasia*', in front of the Governor's tent, and the Agha Benbouali, now promoted Grand Officier of the *Légion d'Honneur*, offered a glass of champagne, before the ceremony closed with the Marseillais.

The aristocracy asserted their power and wealth through a display of magnificent, pure-bred horses, the richness of their harness and saddles, and the number of 'their people', the retainers that they could command to participate in such displays.[38] On the outbreak of the First World War many *caids*, to mark their loyalty to France as opposed to the peasants that resisted conscription, offered to raise their own *goums*, in itself a demonstration of their power to draw on a clientele network and to display the patriotism of their personal followers.[39] Most peasants could not afford to own a horse, which remained a symbol of the status of the *caids*, and the big coalitions took pride in demonstrating their power through the number of *douar* cavalry they could assemble on the grand occasions.[40]

An observer of such lavish 'tribal' ceremonials who imagined that the *caids* and *aghas* had, for the occasion, descended from the hills with their retainers like tribal lords, would have been mistaken. As with the English *nouveaux riches*, city bankers, and financiers that seek to disguise their plebeian origins by acquiring titles, country estates, breeding horses, and going to hounds, so the élite *caids* were significantly urbanized.[41] In the Chelif region most of the *caids* opted to live in

[37] *Le progrès*, 1 April 1920; see D. Guignard, *Abus*, 461–78, for a detailed analysis of a similar Presidential grand tour, that of Loubet in 1903.

[38] *Le progrès*, 2 March 1910, the Paris press described El Hadj Benbouali, *caid* of Guerboussa and Tsighaout on a visit to the capital, 'Brilliantly robed in a white or red burnous, with numerous decorations, his bearing imposing and military in style.... He leads the life of a great patriarchal lord, loved by his family and his servants'. See the photograph in Bachaga Boualam, *Mon Pays, la France* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1962), 177, in traditional dress, with his numerous medals, holding the reigns of his richly adorned horse.

[39] Belkacem Ferhat, was described in an intelligence report of 22 September 1941, AOM 1K/163, as head of 'an ancient noble family' who had gained his spurs as a loyal agent of France by serving in the Spahis during the First World War and, 'had raised a *goum* of thirty men for the Rif campaign of 1925', to help crush the great revolt of independence led by Abdel Krim.

[40] *Le progrès*, 14 June 1939, provides another typical example of such coalition display. On the occasion of the investiture of Hadj Brahim Saiah as *caid* and grand officer of the *Légion d'Honneur*, the car of the Algiers prefect was met two kilometres from the Saiah mansion by an escort of cavalry and, on arrival, 'between two lines of *aghas* and *caids*'. The young *caid* was presented with his scarlet burnous of office and, after various speeches, sat down to a banquet of eighty covers.

[41] For the aristocracy the horse was a symbol of their 'Arab' status, an aristocracy racially superior to the Berber peasants, and in the Chelif the wealthy clans prided themselves on their stables and during the annual Orleansville races they entered for a challenge cup open only to Algerian breeders of Arab thoroughbreds.

townhouses or in large farmhouses in the piedmont from where they had rapid access by car to the centres. Even the *bachaga* Boualam, the archetype of the patriarchal *caid* who claimed to live among 'his' people, the peasants of the vast Beni Boudouane, did not live in the isolated *douar*, but in a large, stone farmhouse in the plain to the south of Lamartine, from where he could get readily by car to carry out his numerous political functions in Orleansville, Algiers, and Paris.[42] When peasants needed to see their *caid* for administrative reasons, to register a birth or to request an ID card, in many instances they had to travel for many hours on foot to a bureaux located in the towns. The élite *caids* thus constituted a highly urbanized group that inhabited large houses that enjoyed all the luxuries of modern living, from piped water to electric lighting.

By the 1920s, and especially during the depression of the 1930s, the *grandes familles* found it increasingly difficult to sustain their power through the semi-feudal clientele systems that had depended on providing a degree of protection and employment for the peasantry in exchange for reciprocal services. This was the type of tribal social solidarity that Ibn Khaldoun termed *açabaya*, a bond that was quite distinct from western forms of individualism or economic calculus, and that was reinforced by the religious *baraka* and sacred lineage of the chieftain.[43] In years of plenty, for example, the aristocracy accumulated grain reserves in large silos (*matmores*) or granaries, and during years of crop failure and famine, would supply their tribesmen with interest-free loans of corn.[44]

Although the tribe largely ceased to exist after the 1870s, the aristocracy sought to retain their status through such support for the poor. At the height of the 1920 famine, the prefect of Algiers visited the village of Medjadja, where he congratulated the Saiah for opening kitchens for the starving poor (*mesquines*) and maintaining the traditions of aristocratic charity.[45] Mohammed Harbi, who grew up in an influential farming family in El Arrouch in the Constantinois during the 1930s, remarks how the provision of food and resources to the needy was directly linked to the honour and status of the Harbis and their political influence among the local populace. The poor, notes Harbi, 'did not condemn the acquisition of wealth, but rather the tendency of the rich to avoid their charitable

[42] B. Boualam, *Mon Pays*, 16. The large, stone farmhouse and mill, built originally by *colons* in 1911–13, still stands today beside the road close to the Oued Fodda Dam.

[43] On Ibn Khaldoun and *açabaya*, see M. Cherrad, *Women's Rights*, 23. On *baraka*, or 'divine blessing', see Raymond Jamous, 'From the Death of Men to the Peace of God: Violence and Peace-making in the Rif', in J. G. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers (eds), *Honour and Grace in Mediterranean Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 167–91.

[44] André Nouschi, *Enquête sur le niveau de vie des populations rurales constantinoises de la conquête jusqu'en 1919* (Paris: PUF, 1961), 288–9 on the system of grain silos. The revolt of Mokrani in 1871 was in part caused by the failure of the government to honour a large debt incurred by the *bachaga* to feed his tribesmen during a famine, A. Nouschi, *Enquête sur le niveau*, 151–2.

[45] *Le progrès*, 2 December 1920.

and philanthropic obligations in conformity with religion'.[46] The personalized relationship between the *caid* and his 'servants' was similar to that between the big landowners and agricultural labourers, the 'deferential workers', analysed by the sociologist Howard Newby, workers who regarded themselves as bound by a moral order of reciprocal obligations.[47]

Saiah patrimonial power in the Chelif derived not only from charitable support but also from their ownership of 20,000 hectares that gave them considerable leverage in the local economy and an ability to reward faithful retainers and voters through tenancy and sharecropper (*khammès*) contracts, or employment as labourers and stewards.[48] The history of the Algerian *khammès* remains under-researched and poorly understood: quite often historians mention it in passing as one of the most miserable categories of rural inhabitant who, after losing their land, passed through this temporary, transitional phase in a free-fall towards total proletarianization and migration to the shanty towns. However in the Chelif, as in many locations in the Mediterranean, from Italy to Palestine, sharecropping remained dynamic into the twentieth century and played a major part in the vitality and adaptability of the peasant economy.[49] In 1938 in the *commune mixte* of Braz, centred on Duperré in the eastern Chelif, the 3,500 *khammès* were almost as numerous as the 4,500 *fellahs*.[50] Likewise in the piedmont *douars* of the CM of Chelif in 1946, the *khammès* made up 60 per cent of all peasant households.[51] One reason for this is that as speculators, including the *grandes familles*, advanced into the piedmont after 1863, they began to acquire small parcels of hilly land on the borders of the plain that were unsuitable for aggregation into large, mechanized farms and they had little choice but to hand over these micro-plots for cultivation

[46] M. Harbi. *Vie debout*, 23, 52. Each morning his grandmother, after milking the cows, would distribute the whey to the needy who queued outside the house. Sometimes an adult Harbi male would recognize, 'a face that displeased him and arrogantly drove them away'. The poor villager could not afford to get on the wrong side of the Harbi!

[47] H. Newby, *The Deferential Worker*.

[48] AOM 91/1K22, sub-prefect of Orleansville report of 6 January 1937, shows that by 1936 Abdelkader Saiah, who was facing severe financial problems, rented the 1,594 hectares that he had inherited to three Algerian tenant farmers, Chakor Djeltia Tahar ben Ahmed, Chebra Henni Abdelkader ben Henni, and Mohammed ben Djilali Djelloul. Saiah procured for these farmers, who were described as his 'clients', and an unknown number of *khammès* a highly advantageous distribution of seed-grain.

[49] Sydel Silverman, 'Patronage and Myth', in E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients*, 7–19, shows how the *mazzadria* system of share-farming in Central Italy, which involved close, even moral, relations of honour and deference between *padrone* and peasant, remained strong down to the Second World War. The situation in the Chelif shared many features with that in Palestine down to the 1940s; see Salim Tamari, 'From the Fruits of their Labour: The Persistence of Share-tenancy in the Palestinian Agrarian Economy', in Kathy and Pandeli Glavanis (eds), *The Rural Middle East: Peasant Lives and Modes of Production* (London: ZED Books, 1990), 70–94.

[50] M. A. Piquet, the deputy administrator of the CM of Braz, CHEAM essay, *Une année d'expérience de l'office du blé dans la commune mixte des Braz*, 24 May 1938 (ANP 20000002/20).

[51] AOM 1Y113; in the piedmont *douar* of Harchoun, for example, there were 300 'small owners' to 400 *khammès*; in the Beni-Bouattab, 115 owners, to 400 *khammès*.

to tenants or *khammès*, often the original peasant owners, who used the traditional techniques of the ox plough-team.[52]

The *khammesat* system enabled the *grandes familles* and rural bourgeoisie to expand landownership in the hilly piedmont more successfully than European settlers, who were in full retreat by the great drought and famine of 1920. This was to carry major social and political consequences during the era of nationalism after the 1930s since the *khammesat* served to maintain the traditional techniques of the peasant farmer along with the forms of social and cultural organization that underpinned it.[53] While some lesser Saiah families devoted themselves to farming their own land, the political leaders like Abdelkader ran their big, modern farms in the plain through managers, while many of the smaller plots that they had acquired in the piedmont were left in the hands of *khammès*. The élite *caids* of the Chelif often moved about the countryside and towns accompanied by a posse of armed agents or retainers who, if necessary, were ready to resort to brutal violence against anyone who got in their way. In 1921 Abdelkader Saiah, accused of forcing a relative Djellouli Della Ali ben Djilali off 139 hectares of land that he coveted, sent a body of *khammès* armed with shotguns to force Djellouli's sharecroppers to quit the fields.[54]

While the press and public opinion, particularly that of the nationalists and communists, widely perceived the Saiah clan as the embodiment of the rich landowning Algerian élite, in reality they inherited in 1919 from the Cadi Henni, some 17,600 hectares that was mortgaged to the hilt and carried debts to the value of 21.6 million francs. Abdelkader Saiah, in the true style of the aristocrat, had a bad reputation for refusing to pay debtors and tradesmen and in March 1933 the Civil Tribunal of Orleansville passed a humiliating order of payment that accused the family of deliberately flouting the law and seeking to avoid their debtors since 1927: 'the many debts contracted by them [the Saiah

[52] AOM 1Y113, the administrator Rohrbacher, report of 30 July 1946, castigated, as did French agronomists in general, the *khammesat* for making 'any progress in agriculture difficult', but at the same time noted that Europeans preferred to rent out dry lands outside the perimeter of colonization since they found, 'the natives more docile and easier to manage under the conditions imposed'. In other words no European farmers or managers could be found to work the difficult land more effectively and more cheaply. See also Souidani, 'Transactions foncières', 87, on a similar situation in the Constantinois where even 'the *colons* utilise primitive methods of cultivation . . . the former work relations persist'.

[53] Augustin Berque, Directeur des affaires musulmans, *Commissions chargée d'établir un programme de réformes politiques, sociales et économiques en faveur des musulmans français d'Algérie* (1944), 2.460, argued that the *khammesat* remained dynamic precisely because it offered small peasants the best chance of survival in years of famine, and what was widely described as an oppressive 'feudal' form of exploitation concealed a strong mutual bond. 'He [*Khammès*] is of the family. Between him and his master there is an ardent brotherhood, founded on shared sweat, the same smell of the glebe, the communion of effort in the sacred labour of the soil.'

[54] J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.811–12, reported in *Ikdam*, 28 October 1921. J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.814, n. 379, in 1905–6 the government authorized European and Algerian farmers to arm their *khammès* as estate guards.

family] proves their firm intention not to pay their debts thus throwing an audacious and permanent challenge to the system of justice in their country.'[55]

The ex-Governor general, Maurice Violette, in his influential book of 1931, *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?*, showed he was aware of the economic difficulties faced by big estate owners and referred specifically to the Saiah. The aristocratic families like the Saiah, claimed Violette, now facing economic crisis, could not be faulted as economically backward, since they used modern agricultural techniques identical to those of the European, but faced a problem of access to capital. Violette spelled out the political implications for the patrimonial system. Such apparently wealthy families had to support the weight not only of a small conjugal family, but of an extended network 'of 120 to 130 individuals, the aged, brothers, sisters, women and children'. In addition the patronage obligations of such clans were very heavy, 'for those that have to defend their prestige, whether political or religious. Indigenous feudalism, like all feudalism, carries with it numerous expenses in relation to the population that submit to the political influence of the chief and, one can add, the marabout character of some families is not without serious obligations.' A great *marabout* family, for example, might feel bound at a wedding to feed a flock of clients, up to 10,000 to 15,000 people, during celebrations that could last several days.[56]

The *grandes familles* attempted to resolve their financial difficulties and to maintain their high status through a dual strategy that combined monopoly of the *caidat* at the local level, mainly by a younger generation of sons and nephews, with the electoral promotion of the clan elders into the key decision-making assemblies and committees of the colonial state in Algiers and Paris. The leaders of what can be termed the 'family-coalitions' recognized that access to the *caidat* held the key to gaining local political influence, land, and the multifarious rewards that could be extorted, legally or by fraud, from rural society, and ensured that their sons would maximize their chances of recruitment through education within the French school system, and by entering the officer corps or gendarmerie. The native affairs specialists in Algiers nurtured a future political élite by supporting suitable recruits from the *grandes familles* as was the case with Abdelkader Saiah who was carefully watched over and promoted in his career by the head of the *Affaires indigènes*, Louis Milliot.[57] Saiah remained within the provincial circles of power in the Orleansville until 1933, when at the age of 46 he moved up the ladder by gaining election to the quasi-parliamentary *Délégations financières* and

[55] AOM 4i206, Algiers prefecture, *note sur la famille Saiah*, dated 15 October 1941. The Orleansville court judgement of 10 March 1933 was confirmed by the Algiers Appeal Court on 10 July 1933.

[56] M. Violette, *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?*, 108. AOM 4i206, *note sur la famille Saiah*, 14 October 1953, comments that Abdelkader Saiah long delayed a lavish wedding for his son Mohammed-Robert Saiah which he could not afford.

[57] AOM 4i206, *notes sur la famille Saiah*, prefecture of Algiers, 15 October 1941.

the departmental *Conseil général* of Algiers. This was a career pattern followed by all the leaders of the *grandes familles* and the promotion to the prestigious status of Delegate, Councillor, Senator, or National Deputy was quickly put to use to establish lucrative networks with the top colonial politicians and officials and, in particular, to promote or expand the interests of their clientele and kinsmen.[58]

On occasions some ambitious 'middle peasants', even without the prestigious genealogy of the *grandes familles* and despite administrative opposition, were able to accumulate land and to establish a strong family-coalition through capture of numerous *caid* positions. A case in point is provided by the scheming and maverick Mohammed Bentaieb, whose rise to power is unusually well documented. Bentaieb, after serving in the First World War, followed a career as an auxiliary gendarme from 1925 to 1940, a standard route for those aiming to gain appointment as a *caid*.[59] Bentaieb gained a foothold as *caid* of the *douar* Telbenet in the *commune mixte* of Djendel in the eastern Chelif valley, and acquired, through dubious financial operations, a prosperous 408 hectare estate in the Djendel region that had once belonged to General Clouzel. Here Bentaieb employed twenty-four agricultural workers and their families. From this base the ambitious Bentaieb successfully climbed into the higher reaches of the political system by winning election to the *Conseil général* in 1945, and to the National Assembly in 1946, and he immediately put his new-found influence to the test by aping the culture of the aristocracy and seeking to nominate members of his family and associates as *caids* of the *douars* of Telbenet, Djendel, Djebel Louh, Beni Fathem, Hannacha, and Gribs. Among those installed as *caids* were his illiterate brother Salah Bentaieb, son-in-law Abdelkader Cherifi, nephew Mohamed Bentaieb, his son Mohammed ben Mohammed, and three close associates.

Not content with this, Bentaieb expanded his political ambitions through a devious *çof* war[60] in which he set out to subvert the authority of the two most powerful *grandes familles* bordering his coalition territory, that of the Agha Boutaleb, the dominant political figure in the eastern Chelif region, and *bachaga* Belkacen Ferhat of Teniet el Haad. Ferhat complained to the Governor General of

[58] For example among the leaders of the Chelif grandes familles, Belkacem Ferhat, like Abdelkader Saiah, became a *conseiller général* and Vice President of the Algerian Assembly in 1948; Menouar Saiah became a Senator in 1946, a *conseiller général* in 1950, and was elected to the National Assembly in 1951; Mohammed Bentaieb became a *conseiller général* in 1946 and was elected to the National Assembly.

[59] Detailed information on the career of Bentaieb can be found at AOM 1K/1179, an investigation carried out by Bouvet a councilor of the *Affaires musulmanes* in February 1944.

[60] I use the term *çof*, as it was by the local administration, to refer to the general battle for power and influence between competing notable families and their clientele: I do not attach to it the complex meanings that have been widely debated by anthropologists and sociologists of the Maghreb in relation to the segmentary theory of clan affiliation developed by Ernest Gellner and others. On the latter see, for example, Alan Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie XIXe et XXe siècles, anthropologie historique du lien social dans les communautés villageoises* (Paris: Bouchène, 2006), 99–123; J. Favret-Saada, *Essais d'anthropologie politique*, 63–100.

the various 'cabals' that had been mounted against him, 'with the complicity of certain individuals subjected [*inféodés*] to Bentaieb's clan'. Gauthier, the administrator of Teniet, recognized that the electoral battle between Bentaieb and Ferhat had little to do with party or ideological politics, but revealed 'all the characteristics of a traditional *çof* conflict so much valued at every level of Muslim society. Thus the political colours sometimes borrowed from our metropolitan parties, with the sole intention of reinforcing their methods of action, should be viewed like that of a flag that covers the nature of the cargo.'[61]

There existed a powerful clientelist logic to the family strategy of accumulating *caid* positions. Once Bentaieb had captured a *douar* he proceeded in a ruthless way to oust the mass of small agents of the CM system, the field guards, *khodjas*, fraction chiefs, and armed horsemen, and replaced them with his own men. This enabled Bentaieb to expand his clientele base by offering rewards, no matter how meagre, to faithful followers, while also providing a host of armed retainers who could turn out to intimidate and control voters during the frequent elections. This is why local electoral contests were often such bloody affairs in which heavily armed retainers of rival factions came to blows round the ballot box.[62]

As Didier Guignard has argued, in a colonial economy that lacked industrial investment, the European and Algerian élites were parasitical on the state apparatus, turning its resources to their private advantage, from manipulation of state subsidies, loans, infrastructural investment, and land grants to allocation of public employment and distribution of welfare. Control of elections held the key to personal enrichment, and 'in Algeria the rush into politics was a substitute for the gold rush'.[63] The bitter, and sometimes violent, conflicts surrounding electoral contests, was often not so much a sign of party political or ideological differences, as a struggle between influential families or clientele for control of public resources.[64]

The control and management of the overall *caid* system was of considerable importance to the colonial government in Algiers since it played a key role in the political domination of rural Algeria and the containment of the ever more threatening expansion of communist and nationalist movements. The process of 'fixing' suitable appointments to the *caidat* was not, for obvious reasons, always transparent, but the archives enable us to piece together how the process worked. As *caid* posts became vacant they were listed in the official colonial press, and

[61] AOM 1K/1179, administrator Teniet el Haad to sub-prefect of Miliana, 27 June 1949.

[62] On the eve of elections in January 1954, the Bentaieb family, fearing a night attack on the Clouzel farm by political opponents, and armed to the teeth, reached such a peak of nervous tension that they shot and killed one of their own stable boys by mistake.

[63] D. Guignard, *Abus*, 168, 194–207, 256–8.

[64] For an analysis of French local party politics as a cover for internecine, family, and factional struggles, see Claude Karnoouh, 'La démocratie impossible. Parenté et politique dans un village lorrain', *Études rurales* 52 (1973), 24–56; Peter M. Jones, 'An Improbable Democracy: Nineteenth-century Elections in the Massif Central', *English Historical Review* 97 (1982), 530–57.

almost immediately a sharp competition ensued in which leading European politicians and Algerian leaders of family-coalitions used their status and influence in favour of their own clients.

The process of selecting *caids*, or awarding the honorary status of *agha* and *bachaga*, was controlled in the Chelif region by the prefect of Algiers in consultation with the Governor General and the *Affaires musulmanes* that constantly monitored and advised on the political suitability of candidates through a specialized intelligence unit, the *Centre d'informations et d'études* (CIE) that operated from 1936 to 1947. The archival correspondence surrounding new appointments indicates that the key decision-makers were torn between promotion of the sons and nephews of the *grandes familles*, many of whom were weak or inexperienced candidates, and a class of 'commoners' from the rural bourgeoisie that had little political leverage, but who had demonstrated years of excellent service in the lower rungs of the army or CM service. The blatant promotion of the inexperienced and incompetent sons of the *grandes familles*, noted administrators, risked alienating the rural bourgeoisie and driving them into the nationalist and communist camps.[65] But, despite such concerns to manage the rewards system, the colonial government invariably ended up handing out honours and positions to the *grandes familles* and further extended their monopoly over the *caidat*.[66]

As we will see later (Chapter 5) the entire CM system and the *caidat* was threatened with abolition during 1945 to 1947 by the local government reform agenda introduced under the liberal governor Chataigneau. The *Affaires musulmanes* and its head Augustin Berque were swept away in September 1945 and replaced by the new *Direction des réformes* under the dynamic Maghreb specialist Lucien Paye. This presented a grave threat to the political interests of the conservative *colon* establishment that organized a covert fight-back, a battle that reached into the heart of the Algiers government. One previously unknown aspect of this secretive conflict between reforming modernizers and the conservative establishment, which continued to bubble under the surface until 1957 and *Opération Pilote*, was the way in which defense of the traditional CM system and the methods of the *Affaires musulmanes*, despite the latters dissolution, were kept alive after 1947 by the special intelligence unit, the *Service des liaisons nord-africain* (SLNA) headed by Colonel Paul Schoen.[67]

[65] AOM 1K/163, prefect of Algiers to Governor General, 9 April 1947.

[66] AOM 1K/163, Abdelkader Saiah to prefect of Algiers, 28 May 1948, on headed note-paper from the Algerian Assembly, is typical of the flood of letters received from influential politicians seeking to promote their own clientele. Saiah requested that his nephew Bouali ben Tahar Saiah, son of the *bachaga* Tahar Saiah, be appointed *agha*: 'His nomination will be the compensation for the services of his father to France and the Administration, and a personal satisfaction to me and all my family.'

[67] The CIE operated from 1936 to 1947, when it was replaced by the SLNA; see Maurice Faivre, 'Le colonel Paul Schoen du SLNA au comité Parodi', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporaines* 208.4 (2002), 69–89.

In a confidential circular of 1950 to the three prefects of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, Naegelen reinforced the need for the SLNA that had succeeded the *Affaires musulmanes* in providing intelligence and advice on 'Muslim politics'.[68] Naegelen was fully aware of the failure of the prefectoral, sub-prefectoral, and CM administrations to detect mounting tensions in rural society that had led to a number of violent eruptions like that at Zeralda in 1942 (twenty-five deaths), Sétif in 1945, Sidi Ali Bounab in 1949, and during various electoral campaigns. The Governor put this failure down to the massive bureaucratic overload affecting provincial administrators, so that they did not have the time and means to retain direct contact with the population in isolated regions. Further to this local administrators frequently 'sweetened' their reports by suppressing thoughts that might conflict with the received opinion of their superiors, 'the doctrines that are dominant among the high up'. The solution to such failings was to be found in the SLNA teams, specialists in Arab and Berber language and culture, located in the Algiers cabinet and attached to the three prefectures, whose task was to 'detect in advance where such [violent] incidents risked breaking out, to determine the causes of discontent, to warn the local authorities in good time', and to suggest preventive measures. The SLNA officers, each supplied with a car, were to go out on tours of inspection through which they could make direct contact with the situation in the *bled*.

The Schoen organization undoubtedly provided the means by which the 'traditional' methods of indirect rule via the *caids* and *grandes familles* was kept alive throughout the period from 1945 to 1956, operating against the modernizers like Lucien Paye who wished to see a major reform of peasant local government and the rural economy. How the SLNA operated to manipulate the political map in the Chelif can be seen in one instance in July 1950 after the death of a leading member of the Saiah clan, Hadj Brahim Saiah, *caid* of Beni Rached, led to a by-election for the two seats he held in the *Assemblée algérienne* and the *Conseil général*.[69] On 25 September 1950 Colonel Schoen wrote a secret report of his tour of inspection to Orleansville to assess the situation before the coming election, to provide an evaluation of each of the possible contenders, all of them from the Saiah and Bouthiba clans. He also consulted the most influential European politicians of the region, the landowner and mayor of Orleansville, Ange Bisambiglia, the industrialist and mayor of Ténès, Bortolotti, and the deputy Auguste Rencurel.[70] Schoen's report provided a thumbnail sketch of each possible

[68] AOM 1K/1297, Governor General to the prefects, 29 August 1950.

[69] In the election of 4 April 1948 to the first seats in the new Assembly, Hadj Brahim Saiah had won, under the system of separate Algerian and European representation, a clear majority in the 9th constituency that covered Ténès, and part of the CM of Chelif. He gained 9,296 votes (51.7 per cent), the MTLD candidate Belaid Othmani 5,547 (30.9 per cent), Abderrahmane Bouthiba, head of a conservative clan, 2,791 (15.5 per cent), and the young communist militant Abdallah Mokarnia, 331 (1.8 per cent).

[70] AOM 4i206, Schoen report to the prefect of Algiers, 25 September 1950.

candidate, of their political reliability (most were approved as 'men of sure loyalty'), and their personal qualities. Schoen reported that the Saiah exerted an unhealthy monopoly over the election of all the councillors and deputies of the region and might be persuaded to stand down in the coming election to the two vacated posts in the Ténès constituency that had traditionally been the terrain of the Bouthiba family. But, claimed Schoen, it was 'a question of honour for the Saiah, not to allow themselves to be removed from the mandates held by the family'. He suggested that a solution be found through a reconciliation between the Saiah and Bouthiba clans, so that a more even distribution of seats could be found, and by late 1952 this project appeared to have been achieved by the imminent marriage of Mohammed Robert Saiah, son of Abdelkader, to the daughter of Abderrahmane Bouthiba.[71]

This provides a typical example of the government modus operandi, a system of so-called *çofs* management, in which family clans would be manipulated from Algiers to achieve a desired electoral outcome. But through such practices, that under Naegelen became a key part of the strategy to contain the nationalist movement, the colonial government reinforced the patrimonial politics of the *grandes familles* and in doing so put paid to any attempts to transform the *caidat* into a class of professionally trained civil servants that could carry out the modernization of the rural economy and local government. The confidential correspondence and reports of the central administration on the leaders of the *grandes familles* were frequently highly scathing as to their education and ability, but what weighed most was the extent to which they could maintain a loyal support base among the mountain peasants and, through patrimonialism, cocoon them from the toxic impacts of the dangerous external forces of modernity, trade unionism, communism, and nationalism. Belkacem Ferhat, for example, despite his encroaching senility, declining faculties, and inability to write French, passed muster since, as the administrator remarked, he exercised, 'his numerous political activities in a spirit of loyal and faithful collaboration with the French administration'.[72]

The situation in the Chelif bears similarities with that in early twentieth-century rural Sicily where an absentee, rentier aristocracy living in the towns handed over management of their latifundia to a new, intermediary class of entrepreneurs (*mafia*) that kept the peasantry in check through control of access to the land, rents, sharecropping, employment opportunities, money lending, and violence.[73] The *mafia* extended its control over the 'local state' and its resources, including access to municipal jobs, through electoral corruption and violence, and a 'rewards' system for compliant voters. 'Since', notes the anthropologist Anton

[71] AOM 4i197, Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique*, 30 December 1952.
[72] AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM Teniet el Haad [*c.*1953].
[73] A. Blok, *Mafia*; see also D. Guignard, *Abus*, 188, on southern Italy and Corsica.

Blok, '*mafiosi* preserved local and regional isolation and remained closely tied to the rent-capitalistic structure of the large estates, which formed one of their main sources of power, the State in reaching this hinterland had no alternative but to operate through them'.[74] Since the State was absent at the local level, and provided no court of appeal, the Sicilian peasantry remained locked into a deferential universe in which they identified with patrons that controlled access to rewards.

However, as we shall see in the next chapter by 1933 in the Chelif the traditional clientele system, despite every attempt by the Algiers government to buttress it, was entering a phase of deepening internal crisis.

[74] A. Blok, *Mafia*, 214; Ernest Gellner, 'Patrons and Clients', in E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients*, 4, likewise identifies a class of 'brokers' or patrons in a 'weak state . . . [that] may encourage quasi-feudal exploitation in outlying rural areas'.

4
The Janus-faced Politics of the *caids*, *c.*1936 to 1954

For both the communist and nationalist press the rich and powerful Saiah family represented the epitome of the class of Algerian feudal land-owners that served as the quislings of their colonial masters and oppressed the starving peasantry. As we have seen in Chapter 3 there was much substance to this conventional portrait of the *grandes familles* and the *caidat*, but the overly black-and-white picture has tended to conceal the fact that the élite was from the 1930s onwards weakened not only by financial problems but also by an inner crisis of conscience that, against all expectation, drew them towards support for moderate forms of nationalism. This chapter centres on how this internal crisis played out and how the distinctive tearing of the *grandes familles* between support for French colonialism and socio-political opposition left them caught in an unresolved, contradictory position that weakened the very class on which the Algiers government was dependent for 'holding' the peasant masses. In general historians have failed to recognize the extent to which the neo-tribal élite, far from uniformly buttressing colonial domination, splintered internally, while many leaders, increasingly sympathetic to some form of moderate or federal independence, contributed openly or covertly to the nationalist cause. The road to armed rebellion was not only paved on the back of the peasantry, but also on that of the feudal leaders and *caids* that were expected to keep them in check.

During the great depression of the 1930s the *grandes familles* in the Chelif began to face a major financial crisis and complained bitterly of the crippling costs they faced in sustaining the elaborate patrimonial system that was so central to French control of the countryside. As soon as Abdelkader Saiah replaced his deceased brother in the *Délégations financières* in 1933, he proposed to the assembly that low interest, medium-term loans should be made available to the aristocracy, devoted servants of France, who were 'on the point of disappearing as a consequence of the economic crisis . . . . In the interests of social stability, it is necessary to provide assistance as soon as possible to these ancient families.'[1] At

[1] J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 2.208–9. AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM Teniet el Haad *c.*1953, in commenting on the considerable wealth of the Ferhat coalition, remarked that it was 'largely used to maintain the status that they consider to be the prerogative of their family'. Other landed *grandes familles* faced ruin in the 1930s; see M. Launay, *Paysans*, 263 on *bachaga* 'B' in Oranie, owner of 9,000 hectares, who was bankrupted in 1937.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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the same time the *grandes familles*, who during the 1920s had almost automatically dominated the elections, the golden route to political and economic state rewards, found themselves challenged in the rural constituencies by the rapid surge towards anti-colonial nationalism.

Abdelkader Saiah's entry into national electoral politics after 1933, especially through the *Délégations financières* where he held the prestigious position of president of the Arab section, represented a bid to escape the narrow confines of the rural Chelif and to gain access to a new level of power and wealth. Winning election to higher office greatly expanded the opportunities for accruing personal wealth through close links to the top circles of government and party decision-makers, mainly Europeans, wealth that could in turn be redistributed at the local level through the patronage and extended family network. But, at the same time, entry into national electoral contests posed a new problem, that of how to carve out a client base in large regional constituencies of tens of thousands of voters, at the very moment in the 1930s that mass nationalist parties were expanding into the provinces. The Saiah domination of the Chelif *douars* and clientele networks enabled them to control or influence electors within a restricted, localized zone, but to gain access to the rich rewards of national elections it was increasingly difficult to deploy sufficient charismatic power and financial rewards, jobs, and hand-outs to win the vote of much wider constituencies.[2]

Inevitably the conservative Saiah coalition was driven to compete on the terrain of conventional national party politics and as Abdelkader Saiah did so he moved towards a more reformist agenda in which he cultivated a public image as a defender of the rights and interests of the population of the Chelif, including the mass of famished peasants. The arrival of mass party organizations during the 1930s led to a 'nationalization' of politics, in the sense that electoral support was now increasingly dependent on the élites ability to demonstrate to the rural masses that they could gain real benefits for 'their people' at the level of central state policies and budget allocations.

The shift of the *grandes familles* and the *caidat* towards a reformist or populist politics was to contribute in a major, but unseen way, towards the terminal crisis of Algerian colonialism. In general historians, in line with the French left and nationalist commentators, have viewed the *caids* as a homogenous group, the prime instrument of colonial containment and repression of the peasant masses. But this is to overlook the extent to which the *caidat* was internally divided or

[2] Gérard Bergé, in his 1953 CHEAM study, '*Caids et élus en Algérie*', ANP 20000046/82, showed how the family coalition strategy of accumulating local *caid* positions provided them with an almost automatic support in the *douars* when progressing to departmental elections for higher assembly places. For example, one family (W) in the CM of Mascara, that had four *caids*, controlled 3,500 votes, to which they could add another 1,500 through marriage alliance with family (X) to the west, and 2,000 through links to a *cheikh* in the Sud. In all 8,000 assured votes provided a massive head-start in any electoral contest.

highly ambiguous in relation to French domination and the extent to which the defection of the conservative Algerian élites brought about the eventual collapse of French hegemony. This process was eventually marked by Soustelle's suspension of the Algerian Assembly in 1955, and the growing clandestine support of many élites, and especially of their sons, for the FLN. Well before November 1954 the regime was beginning to lose the support of many *caids*, the 'natural' intermediaries of indirect rule, that were so crucial to the flow of intelligence from the mountain zones. The roots of this change among the Chelif *grandes familles* can again be tracked through the example of Abdelkader Saiah.

Abdelkader Saiah became a delegate to the *Délégations financières* during the watershed of 1932–6 that marked a turning-point in the history of colonial Algeria, one that coincided with the foundation in 1930–1 of the *Fédération des élus musulmans* (FEM) led by Ferhat Abbas and Dr Bendjelloul and of Ben Badis's *Association des ulema musulmans algériens* (AUMA). The transfer in 1936 of Messali Hadj's party apparatus from metropolitan France to Algeria and the rapid expansion of the PCA and trade union movement during the 1936 Popular Front further added to the radical surge. The election of several *Élus* delegates, including Bendjelloul and Abbas, to the *Délégations* injected a dynamic, progressive voice into the chamber, one that compelled the old guard (*vieux turbans*) to take note of issues relating to what was termed the '*paysannat*', the need for a developmental programme to reach the millions of peasants abandoned in the interior. In 1935–6 modern forms of mass party organization erupted into the slow-moving life of the Algerian provinces and presented a challenge to the old-style élite clientele politics.

Jacques Bouveresse has argued that the stereotype of the Algerian aristocracy promulgated during the 1920s by the publicists of *jeunes algériens*, the young Turks, and repeated at the time by European liberals and socialists, as the 'Yes-men' (*béni-oui-oui*) of the colonial administration, needs to be treated with caution.[3] This élite, he notes, was indeed highly conservative but remained in close touch with rural society, '*l'Algérie profonde*', and understood better than the urban-based *jeunes algériens* the mental and social universe of the peasant. The delegates knew that there was little they could achieve to improve the lot of the peasants within a dual-chamber that gave the Europeans an automatic majority, but they remained highly consistent in defending what was closest to their hearts: Islam, religious education, Arabic language and culture, and the personal statute and customary law relating to marriage and the family.

By the 1930s the days of the *jeunes algériens* assimilationists were over, but the conservative *vieux turbans* that appeared in their elaborate dress as a relic of nineteenth-century tribal chiefs, by a strange anomaly, retained a strong affinity

[3] J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.826.

with the rising tide of cultural nationalism and identity politics represented by the reformist *Ulema* and *Élus*. Abdelkader Saiah, through his close contact in the *Délégations* with progressives like Bendjelloul, Foudil, and Sisbane, began to assume a more open critical position in relation to the failings of the colonial government, especially in the rural areas of the *communes mixtes*. When Saiah was re-elected president of the Arab section in May 1936, he underlined his duty to serve the interests of 'the native population among whom I live. I know their needs and witness their poverty daily'.[4] In an acrimonious debate on the budget in May 1936, in the presence of Milliot, the head of the *Affaires indigènes*, Saiah did not mince his words in exposing the failure of government famine relief in the interior: 'In particular in my region I have seen hundreds of natives die without help who were only suffering from [avoidable] physiological causes.' Some flour mills, he added, had distributed poor or adulterated wheat mixed with soil.[5] The session addressed a range of problems in the *douars*, from the continuing European appropriation of native land, the lack of credit facilities, and poor housing, to the derelict state of rural mosques and the exclusion of Algerian children from local schools.[6]

From 1936 onwards the three dominant aristocratic families of the mid-Chelif, the Saiah, Benbouali, and Bouthiba, in order to retain their regional power and status could not afford to ignore the emergence of a current of social reformism or welfare colonialism that sought to address the issue of the rural masses that had been largely neglected by the state. This developmental current marked the moment at which a rational, technocratic model began to impinge on the somnolent patrimonial world of the aristocratic *grandes familles*. By the mid-1930s delegates, keenly aware of their dependence on the rural electorate, began to generate propaganda that presented them as champions of the oppressed. For example, they contacted the editors of local newspapers to ensure that they fully reported the speeches or reform policies they promoted in the *Délégations* in favour of the Chelif peasantry.[7]

However, the metamorphosis of the conservative and élitist Abdelmalek Saiah into a defender of the peasantry and vocal critic of a failing colonial system presented a political opportunism that was, for example, exposed during a major controversy that flared up in late 1936.[8] Harvest failure, and the associated threats of peasant bankruptcy, dispossession, and famine, provided the most dangerous issue confronting local government. Following the poor harvest of

[4] *Délégation financières algériennes* (DFA). Section arabe, 19 May 1936.

[5] DFA. Section arabe, 27 May 1936.

[6] J. Bouveresse, *Délégations*, 1.893–5, summarizes the global demands of the delegates, dominated by the aristocratic élite, between 1932 and 1939, and concludes that they shared the same underlying values as those of Bendjelloul and the nationalist *Élus*.

[7] DFA. *Section arabe*, 27 May 1936.

[8] AOM 91/1K22, holds a rich file of correspondence on this affair.

1935–6 the Governor General sent out a circular on 31 August to ensure that the local authorities distributed seed-grain to the most needy peasants or farmers on the grounds that failure to sow would store up massive crop deficiencies in the following agricultural cycle. In the Chelif, as elsewhere in Algeria, it was the CM administrator, who also supervised the *Société indigènes de prévoyance* (SIP), that controlled the state monopoly in the buying, storage, and distribution of cereals, and carried out the task of calculating the quantities of seed that should be loaned.

Among peasants facing endemic hunger, claims of fraudulent distribution of state wheat regularly provided the single most volatile cause of popular unrest, and angry crowds frequently marched on the urban bureaux of the administrators throughout the 1930s and 1940s. On 9 December 1936 peasants from the *douars* of Tsighaout, Guerboussa, and Temdrara, under the leadership of the communist militant Marcel Montagné, marched on the sub-prefecture of Orleansville.[9] Abdelkader Saiah supported the protest and presented the sub-prefect with the copy of a letter he had sent to the Governor General in which he accused the CM administrator Kaes of stirring up unrest through distribution that had grossly favoured certain well-to-do individuals to the disadvantage of thousands of peasants.[10]

The sub-prefect robustly defended his subordinate, Kaes, and produced a devastating report that exposed in close detail the extraordinary double-standards of the Saiah coalition.[11] At a meeting of the Commission for the *arrondissement* of Orleansville on 28 September Saiah had insisted on Kaes increasing the grain allocation from 2,000 to 5,000 quintals so as to ensure that the distribution reached the wealthier farmers on the casuistical grounds that they, facing immediate problems of seed supply, could be classified as among the 'needy'. Most extraordinary of all was the fact that the sub-prefect was able to produce a detailed list of the nineteen Algerian landowners that had monopolized the distribution of nearly 3,000 quintals, of whom twelve were from the Saiah family, and four their rich tenants and *khammès*. The sub-prefect concluded that all the wealthy beneficiaries of the grain distribution were 'clients' of Abdelkader Saiah and Djilali Saiah, both of whom were currently campaigning in the elections for the *Conseil général* and the *Délégations financières*. The political motivation of the Saiah's

[9] On Montagné (1888–1975), see René Gallissot (ed.), *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier: Maghreb, Algérie. Engagements sociaux et question nationale. De la colonisation à l'indépendance de 1830 à 1962* (Paris: Édition de l'Atelier/Édition Ouvrières, 2006), 488–9. The Arab-speaking owner of a construction company in Orleansville, he was with Mohammed Marouf the most important trade union and communist activist in the Chelif from the 1920s to the 1950s. Elected town councilor in 1935, member of the PCA central committee in 1936, interned under Vichy (1939–43), he participated in the Maquis Rouge of 1956 before passing into the FLN network.

[10] AOM 91/1K22, Saiah to Governor General [undated], claimed that 4,500 quintals of seed-grain had been loaned to twenty 'privileged' individuals, some of whom were not even farmers, while 20,000 peasants from the twenty-six *douars* had received only 4,747 quintals.

[11] AOM 91/!K22, sub-prefect of Orleansville to prefect of Algiers, 6 January 1937.

defence of 'the impoverished little peasants of the Chelif' was, he claimed, quite transparent.

After 1945 Mohammed Bentaieb presented himself in a similar way during electoral campaigns as the champion of the people, while systematically plundering the peasants. His personnel file contains details of a catalogue of minor scams such as issuing a false passport to a pilgrim to Mecca, selling a second-hand car through the inducement of the issue of an illegal taxi drivers licence, or defrauding an illiterate widow in the sale of three houses. The level at which the Bentaieb family abused the peasantry and plundered the resources that were meant for their welfare was breathtaking. Between 1949 and 1953 Bentaieb, his brother, son, nephew, and son-in-law made seventeen loans from the Djendel SIP to the value of 2,819,500 francs, and in October 1953 still owed all the money, as well as 550,787 francs in interest. A fund that was intended to alleviate small peasant debt and to prevent usury had been plundered by one of the region's wealthiest families.[12] Abdelkader Saiah and Mohammed Bentaieb both clearly believed in a highly stratified quasi-feudal society in which the status of élites and poor peasants constituted a natural hierarchy in which the disproportionate allowances made by the state to the aristocracy were seen as a legitimate reward for their maintenance of their costly patrimonial functions.[13]

However, the anti-French aspect of the *grandes familles* derived, in many instances, from more than political opportunism. The extent to which the *caid* élites were able to switch from loyal servants of France to an oppositional role drew, in part, upon the deep reserve of Muslim identity politics and culture. Gilbert Meynier, in his study of the inter-war nationalist, the Emir Khaled, notes how, like many other notables, he engaged in a double game (*double jeu*) in relation to the French state. Meynier argues that in a situation in which open, strong resistance to French domination was impossible, Algerians were compelled to resort to alternative forms of escape from European hegemony, a strategy that James Scott has analysed as the 'hidden transcript', a weapon of the weak. Religious leaders and notables utilized a double language, a discourse that was quite different when addressed to the authorities, from the 'private' language addressed to a popular Algerian audience.[14]

A dramatic indication of the depth of alienation from French values came during 1910 to 1911 when the authorities were shaken by the mass flight of several thousand Algerians from the Tlemçen and Chelif region to Morocco, Tunisia,

[12] AOM 1K/1179.

[13] AOM 1K/1179, Bentaieb expressed surprise at being pursued by the CM administrator for his large SIP debts since it was his due, he claimed, as was the practice, 'in relation to Muslim *grandes familles* that had been aided, as was the case, in past times'.

[14] A. Koulakssis and G. Meynier, *L'Émir Khaled*, 10, 23, 41, 50–1.

and Syria.[15] This religious flight (*hijra*) was for many based on the Koranic teaching that the faithful should, whenever possible, physically escape from the land of the infidel (*dar-el-harb*) to find refuge in the land of the believers (*dar-el-Islam*). Although the immediate socio-economic roots of the exodus lay in military violence, land dispossession, famine, and the repressive Native Code, it was also an expression of a deep attachment to Islam, and the fear that their Muslim identity was at risk from the invasive impacts of secular French modernity. The reflex reaction of many Algerians, when they could not flee abroad, was to preserve an inviolate domestic sphere that was safe from contact with the French, a kind of internal mental *hijra*.

Many families prided themselves on their role in opposing the French occupation under Abdelkader or during the last great revolts of the nineteenth century, a tradition of resistance that was kept very much alive in group memory. Linked to this was the strength of the belief, found even among those that collaborated closely with the French, that assimilation to western culture was to be opposed at all costs and especially in the private sphere of the household that was seen as a sacrosanct refuge. There are numerous indicators of the continuing strength of this deep sense of Muslim identity, including the refusal to accept naturalization, to educate sons in French schools, or to tolerate European styles of clothing, music, cinema, and dance. Hocine Ait Ahmed, who belonged to a famous *marabout* dynasty in Kabylia, describes in detail 'the family tradition of non-cooperation with the colonial administration', as does Mohammed Harbi and the fact that his great uncle Baye Sidi, the patriarch of the extended family household 'considered the impermeability of the group as the essential prerequisite for self-defense against the *colons*'.[16] Such families maintained an ambiguous relationship to the colonial authorities, one in which they might comply with the administration when it served their purposes, but at the same time cooperation was often part of a strategy of containment of the administration, a way of ensuring that its local impact could be monitored, restricted, or diverted into a channel that would least interfere in local life. Such values led many élite families to support the forms of bourgeois and conservative nationalism that was developed after 1930 by the *Élus*, the *Ulema* reformists, and later the UDMA party.[17]

Muslim doctrine justified the act of internal resistance through the concept of *taqiya* or *kitman*, that dissimulation of religious belief or practice was legitimate

[15] C.-A. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans*, vol. 2, ch. 39, 'L'émigration des musulmans algériens et l'exode de Tlemçen'. The exodus from the *commune mixte* of Chelif and Ténès was in part encouraged by rumours spread by European speculators to gain access to Algerian land.

[16] H. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 14 ; M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 14.

[17] James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006). Bruno Etienne, 'Clientelism in Algeria', in Ernest Gellner and JohnWaterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977) 294, notes that the Islamic concept of *kitman* legitimated the concealment of religious belief in the face of persecution by a dominant power, in particular through silence or omission.

under conditions of persecution. Although the connection is uncertain, there is evidence of a widespread Maghrebian culture of what western or French observers viewed, often with racist or Orientalist overtones, as a genetic tendency of 'Arabs' to be skilled in the arts of deception, trickery, and the ruthless exploitation of others, including fellow Algerians.[18] Negative stereotypes of the two-faced 'Arab' were particularly prevalent among the *pieds noirs*, an attitude that tended to undermine the *caids* in particular since they, in principle the main instrument of colonial government in the interior, were a target of accusations of treachery. Each time that unrest flared up among the mountain peasants of the Dahra and Ouarsenis, urban-based journalists and politicians pointed to the *caids* as the weak link in the intelligence state.[19]

Mohamed Bentaieb was described by contemporary French officials as the epitome of the unprincipled, opportunist 'Arab'. Such was the conclusion of one official in a secret report to the prefect of Algiers in April 1946: 'Cunning and boastful, driven by the urge to maintain a façade and a spirit of intrigue that nothing can disconcert, M. Bentaieb passes for a corrupt, unscrupulous, and inordinately ambitious person, possessing neither the moral qualities, nor the dignity that can command respect. Notwithstanding, he gives every assurance to the Administration that it can, in all circumstances, count on his fidelity and loyalty'. However, in many respects Bentaieb was quite typical of the *grandes familles* in the Chelif, and the outrage expressed by *colons* towards the perfidious *caids* was rooted in their Orientalist failure to comprehend the fact that Algerian rural society operated according to values that were entirely different from those of West Europeans. The *caids* retained to some extent the mark of a recent tribal past, of patriarchy and patrimonialism, core values that were linked to the extended, communal family and its political expression in client relations.[20]

[18] Bachir Hadjadj, *Les voleurs de rêves. Cent cinquante ans d'histoire d'un famille algérienne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007), 221–3, describes how his father a *caid* taught him the age-old wisdom and survival skills of his ancestors that consisted of a permanent distrust of others who were out to deceive and take advantage. The key was to always remain silent or to answer in the negative, especially in relation to adversaries who were stronger, 'always make use of ruse: do not reveal to him your true feelings, nor that you dislike him. Never disclose your plans for a journey, nor your deeper convictions . . . '. *Pieds-noirs* society sustained the trope that Arabs were constitutionally incapable of telling a European the truth.

[19] During the famine of 1920, colons turned to the *caids* to remind them of their duty to control the interior; see *Le Progrès*, 17 February 1921, the *agha* Benbouali, *caid* of the *douars* of Tsighaout and Guerboussa, who was called on to repay all the honours he had recently received from France, by a severe repression of crimes among the mountain peasants of Beni Hindel. *Le progrès*, 30 September 1920 reporting on the arrest of twenty-seven Algerians after a night attack on a farm, noted it was important for the *caids* to locate the leaders since it was difficult to counter banditry by standard police procedures as criminals could find refuge 'in native territory', where they were protected by the population. 'The *douar* chiefs and the *caids* have access to sources of information that European investigators could not. They know and their silence makes them accomplices'.

[20] The anthropologist David Hart has explored this issue in an essay on 'Riffian morals', the values of the Berber mountain tribes of northern Morocco, in Vergilius Ferm (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Morals* (New York: Philosophic Library, 1956), 481–90. The primacy of the family, kin, and tribe meant that moral obligation remained restricted to the inner circle, while all outsiders were fair game for untruth

Socio-cultural relations in the Chelif were not dissimilar from the 'amoral familism' described by Edward Banfield in the *Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1955), a study of a southern Italian village. Banfield ascribed the poverty of the region to an ethos in which the inhabitants were unable to work together to achieve the common good since they acted from self-interest to procure the interests of the immediate family.[21] The political scientist Robert Putnam took this as the starting point for his influential comparative study of Italian regional reform, *Making Democracy Work* (1993).[22] He argues that those areas that failed to engage in strong economic development suffered from an absence of a public-spirited civic culture, of a collaborative associational life, and a consequent fragmentation of social life and an absence of trust and egalitarian political relations. Putnam linked this in part to the survival in regions like Calabria of patron-client politics in which voters polled less for progressive issues, such as better public health, than for 'big man' power brokers through whom they would seek to advance their individual or familial interests.[23]

Likewise, in the context of rural society in inter-war Algeria, it was difficult for peasants, bound by intense ties to the family group and the village commune, to comprehend party ideologies and the potential gains to be made from voting for politicians that might use the power of the central state to provide them with schools, hospitals, roads, and piped water. In this situation loyalty to family would usually trump loyalty to the wider society or some rather abstract 'nation'. In the inter-*çof* battles for family power engaged in by the Saiah and Bentaieb, the leaders had little compunction in prioritizing the advantages to be gained by their own kin or clients over that of other competing clans or networks, including the disadvantaged peasantry. As Mounira Charrad notes, Maghrebi politics and state-formation continued during the mid-twentieth century to be dominated by kin-based solidarities. In such societies, 'when people unite for political action, they do so primarily as members of a kin-based community rather than as members of a class, occupational group, or ideological movement'.[24]

By the 1930s, and in particular from the end of the Second World War onwards, patrimonialism and the patron-client system came increasingly under

and intrigue, and if personal power 'cannot be obtained through force and violence, trickery and cunning are resorted to, and culturally sanctioned'. David D. Gilmore, 'Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982), 175–205, called for comparative research on the proclaimed virtue of cheating and deception of all those who were not kinsman, a norm that could be found across the Mediterranean world.

[21] Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

[22] Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[23] On the issues faced by clientelism in the electoral politics of the modern Middle East, see Daniel Corstange, *The Price of a Vote in the Middle East: Clientelism and Communal Politics in Lebanon and Yemen* (Cambridge: CUP, 2016).

[24] M. Charrad, *States and Women's Rights*, 4.

tension as nationalism and an expansion of mass politics, made it more difficult to control or monopolize the rewards system that sustained it. The *caidat* was caught in a contradictory position between the hierarchical and vertical solidarities of the blood-clan or personal fealty, and the horizontal, more universalist ties of class or nation. The post-war decade saw a transitional phase of political modernization, an unstable balance between the patrimonial world of the tribe and fraction, and the universe of modern electoral politics. This created an unstable situation in which rural notables often oscillated between the two positions, or tried to play the two codes at the same time through '*attentisme*' or an amalgam of quite different, and apparently contradictory, public and private voices. The '*double jeu*' oscillated between the discourse of modern politics, shaped for a French-speaking and urban audience, and one in Arabic for popular Algerian gatherings. The dualism was also one of space, a rhetoric shaped for French politicians in the urban centres, the national assembly or *Délégations*, and another refined to match the grievances and cultural perceptions of the *douar* population of the interior.

The Saiah family, like so many other conservative aristocratic families, nursed within the private circle of the household deep religious convictions and a defensive attitude towards Muslim culture and identity that separated them from, or placed them in opposition to, assimilation into the secularism of the Republican tradition. Abdelkader Saiah's father had in the early 1900s, quite significantly, fought to block European penetration and land-settlement in the clan's holy seat at Medjadja, and it was perhaps no coincidence that the *Ulema* had by 1952 established cells in the *douar*.

In early 1944 Abdelmalek Saiah, sympathetic to the Islamic reformism of Ben Badis, had played a key role in the foundation of the *medersa* El Khaldounia in Orleansville that was soon, under its director Henni Adda Djilali, to become a hotbed of nationalist propaganda and activism. A police report of 1949 claimed that Djilali, who had consistently 'demonstrated his violent anti-French sentiments', was the author and actor of theatrical sketches performed in the school that celebrated the independence of the Muslim people.[25] In 1956 an army intelligence officer, Lieutenant Comte, described Bentaieb as a dangerous man working against France who, while pretending to be loyal, 'was completely won over to the nationalist cause and was beyond doubt involved with the H.L. L [*hors-les-lois* or outlaws]'.[26] Comte later investigated Bentaieb's treacherous behaviour and '*double jeu*', and noted how when giving a speech before a

[25] AOM 4i206, report of *Renseignements généraux* Orleansville to sub-prefect, 18 December 1950. One of Djilali's pupils during 1946–7, Abderrahmane Krimi, *Mémoires* (Algiers: Dar El Oumma, 2006), 15, 19, was encouraged by his master to study at Fez, and was to become second in command of *wilaya* 4.

[26] AOM 1K/1179, *Chef de bataillon Bouquet*, Orleansville to the Commander of the Military Division, Algiers, 31 August 1956.

European audience he was favourable to France, but in addressing Algerians in Arabic his position was the opposite.[27]

Between the Allied landings in November 1942 and the Sétif massacre of May 1945 Abdelkader Saiah played a significant role in supporting the moderate nationalist movement. Saiah joined forces with Ferhat Abbas and other Algerian politicians in signing two versions of the *Appel aux nations alliées*, of 10 February and 31 March 1943, known as the *Manifeste*. The Manifesto presented what, in the context, were revolutionary demands for a rapid post-war transition to an autonomous, 'Social democratic Algerian Republic' that would put an end to colonial domination.[28] The Manifesto represented a moment in history in which a vast revolutionary movement burst from the depths of Algerian society, born along by an optimistic and millenarian expectation of imminent change. To that extent, it marked the start of the 'long war' of Independence, a continuous phase of crisis and turmoil that lasted from late 1942 to 1962.

One of the most remarkable features of this crucial watershed that historians have tended to overlook was the extent to which pressure for change was led and supported by the old political élites. On 22 May 1943 the *Délégations financières*, abolished by Vichy three years earlier, was reconvened and all twenty-one of the pre-war Algerian delegates, headed by its president Abdelmalek Saiah, adopted and signed a modified version of the Manifesto (the '*Additive*'). On 1 June, unfortunately for the delegates, Governor Peyrouton, who had been prepared to negotiate on the Manifesto, was replaced by General Catroux who rejected all such demands and insisted that French colonial power would be fully reinstated in the post-war world. Abbas continued to organize resistance in the *Délégations financières* and, during a special session on 22 September, fifteen of the twenty-one delegates voted a motion reaffirming their support for change. Catroux responded immediately, dissolved the Arab and Kabyle sections of the *Délégations*, and arrested Abbas and Saiah who were sent into exile on the confines of the Sahara.[29]

The transformation in the global political position of the Saiah, as of the other aristocratic families in the region, between the 1920s and 1940s, from one of an integral support for French colonialism to a demand for Algerian autonomy, and a

[27] On this double language see M. Harbi, *L'Algérie et son destin*, 48, 'The discourse of the nationalist élite was double-sided. It was based on a rational and scientific philosophy in French and, on the other hand, on an Arabic discourse marked by Islamic culture'; see also A. Koulakssis and G. Meynier, *L'Emir Khaled*, 10, 23.

[28] On the fullest treatment of this crucial watershed, see Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Aux origines de la guerre d'Algérie, 1940–1945. De Mers-el-Kébir aux massacres du Nord-Constantinois* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); see also Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Ferhat Abbas et l'évolution politique de l'Algérie musulmane pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale' [1975], reprinted in C.-R. Ageron, *Genèse de l'Algérie algérienne* (Paris: Bouchène, 2005), 260–85; Benjamin Stora and Zakya Daoud, *Ferhat Abbas, une autre Algérie* (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 2011), 105–53; F. Abbas, *La Nuit Coloniale*, 133–59.

[29] B. Stora and Z. Daoud, *Ferhat Abbas*, 15, 125–6.

new constitution with some form of dominion or federal status, carried major implications for the deepening, terminal crisis of French colonialism. The Algerian government was threatened by a loss of purchase over the very notables and their clientele networks on whom it depended for the indirect rule of peasant society in the Dahra and Ouarsenis. While some Delegates, chastened by the arrests, sought to distance themselves from the Manifesto and to seek the government's blessing (*aman*), others, including Saiah after his release, remained publicly committed to Abbas's radical programme. On 3 January 1944 Abbas and Saiah, their nationalist prestige enormously increased by their two months imprisonment, jointly issued a declaration in support of Algerian autonomy and on 14 March 1944 launched a new political movement, the *Amis du Manifeste et de la libération* (AML), that quickly set fire to provincial Algeria.

Abdelkader's new found status as a populist leader seems to have been confirmed by his prominent role in intervening during the famine of 1945 to pacify a major food riot in Orleansville on 16 April 1945, three weeks before Sétif. However, the insurrectionary movement, massacres, and vast repression in the north Constantinois of May 1945 led to a dramatic reversal in the position of the conservative Saiah. Bourgeois politicians like Abbas and Saiah were horrified by what they regarded as an irresponsible PPA-inspired revolt that had, they thought, been secretly organized by Messali Hadj.[30] Although the peasants of the Ouarsenis and Dahra remained relatively quiet during the Sétif events, reports of the CM of Chelif record how a *grande peur* swept through the isolated European centres, and many colons fled in panic to fortified bunkers at Molière and Teniet el Haad.[31] The very day after the Sétif events Abdelkader Saiah requested a meeting with the governor Chataigneau and gave assurances of his willingness to cooperate with the government.[32] Chataigneau informed de Gaulle on 1 June that Saiah had sent a telegramme in the name of the Muslims of Orleansville and the town council, which backed repression and expressed loyalty to the French Republic and the 'glorious' General de Gaulle.[33] After Sétif Saiah returned to the government camp, and was soon welcomed back into the fold as a firm 'friend of France', an official confidence that was rewarded by his elevation in 1948 as president of the new Algerian Assembly. However, Pandora's box had been opened, and Saiah's brief

[30] C.-R. Ageron, 'Un manuscrit inédit de Ferhat Abbas. Mon testament politique', [1994], reprinted in *Genèse de l'Algérie algérienne*, 447–66.

[31] J.-L. Planche, *Sétif 1945*, 259–60, starving peasants descended from the Ouarsenis to cut standing wheat in the plains.

[32] ANP. F60/872. Chataigneau wrote to de Gaulle: 'No doubt there will be a way to make use of his good intentions in order to achieve a general calm.' Saiah was, no doubt, reacting in panic to the arrest and imprisonment of Ferhat Abbas on the morning of 8 May: see B. Stora and Z. Daoud, *Ferhat Abbas*, 148–9.

[33] ANP. F60/872. Saiah stated in the telegramme that he, 'condemns the violent and barbarous acts that have steeped the department of Constantine in blood, and has complete confidence in you for a just repression of the culprits STOP We express our sentiments of devotion and loyalty towards the French Republic and the Glorious General de Gaulle'.

but important alliance with Abbas and the AML had, at a critical moment, opened the door to the diffusion of a mass populist nationalism into the rural Chelif.

Abdelkader Saiah was not the only coalition leader in the Chelif to play an ambiguous role in relation to the rapidly expanding nationalist movement. When Abdelkader Saiah abandoned the AML in June 1946 after Sétif and reclaimed his position as key French collaborator in the region, the other major clans, the Benbouali and Bouthiba, which were his bitter rivals, continued to support the nationalist cause in opposition to the Saiah clan. Abderrrahmane Bouthiba called on his family allies, including the *caid* Tahar Bouthiba, to support the UDMA candidate, Mohammed Benaourane, against Abdelkader Saiah in the elections to the 8th Orleansville constituency of April 1948. Benarouane, who was born in 1905 in Duperré, which later emerged as the key bastion of the PCA in the Chelif, was identified as a communist militant in Orleansville in 1939, but he later moved from the PCA to support the AML and by 1948 he was regional secretary of the UDMA, and a member of the Federal Committee. A leading figure in the politics of Orleansville, he was closely linked to the *Ulema* and by 1954 was honorary president of both the Orleansville *medersa* (El Khaldounia) and the Ténès *medersa* (Dar el Mancif), that were to play a key role in the later organization of regional FLN networks.[34] By 1953 Benarouane, an entrepreneur who owned carpentry workshops in Orleansville, was using his forestry workers in the *douar* Beni Hindel to distribute tracts and to organize electoral support in the high Ouarsenis.[35] It seems likely that the UDMA were organizing in the *douars* with the complicity of the *caids* of the Benbouali family in the *douars* Beni Hindel, Beni Bou Attab, and Beni Boukhanous.[36] During the April 1948 elections to the Algerian Assembly the *caid* Mohamed ben Belkheira Benbouali had provided accommodation for MTLD delegates, and two years later Ali ben Mohamed Benbouali, brother of the *caid* of Beni Boukhanous, was also arrested for nationalist activities.[37] As we will see later, by 1956 the sons of both the Saiah and Benbouali clans were deeply involved in the organization of the FLN network in Orleansville.

However, most revealing of the 'double game' played by the political élite was Mohammed Bentaieb, the arch manipulator and opportunist, who skilfully presented himself to one audience, usually in Arabic, as a populist champion of the common people, and to another, usually in French, as the nemesis of the

[34] On Benaourane, see AOM 4i206; Nacera Aggoun, 'La résistance algérienne dans le Chélif algérois, 1945–1962', doctoral thesis, Paris 8, 1996', 375, 578; Malika Rahal, 'L'union démocratique du Manifeste algérien (1946–1956), l'autre nationalisme algérien', History thesis, INALCO, Paris (2007), 116, 125. Benaourane was imprisoned during the War of Independence as an FLN activist.

[35] AOM 4i206, Nicolle, *Monographie politique*, 1 March 1953.

[36] AOM 4i206, Orleansville police report, 17 February 1945, on the arrest of Djilali Saiah-Bouali, aged 27 years, for distributing AML tracts and the journal *Egalité* with the assistance of three young shoe-shine boys.

[37] AOM 4i206, report Pierre Nicolle, 6 May 1950.

communists and Messalists. Bentaieb was a gifted public orator and addressed his audiences during festivals at *marabout* shrines, family celebrations, and market-places, in an Arabic that was described as a 'simple language full of imagery'. As nationalism surged in the Chelif region after 1944, so Bentaieb launched into a diatribe against a failing colonial system. On the heels of the 1945 famine he carried out a sustained attack on Beltzunz, the administrator of the CM of Djendel, by contacting his superiors and making false charges of absenteeism and a failure to assist the poor peasants through distribution of seed-grain or creation of jobs through public works.

Typical of Bentaieb's populist campaigning was his organization of a public meeting in a cinema in Miliana on 7 February 1946, attended by four hundred Algerians, when he reported back to his electors on how he had fulfilled his new mandate as a *conseiller général*.[38] He claimed to exert a bold influence at the higher levels of the colonial state through interceding with the Governor General, the prefect of Algiers, and General Tubert, to protest at insufficient wheat rations, while in the *Conseil général* he passed a resolution demanding equality in the distribution of bread, food, and cloth. He also demanded assistance for the poor Muslims in rags that lived in the streets, but among whom one would never find European infidels ('*kafares*'). He pushed his rhetoric perilously close to an anti-French position: 'If France loves us, we must love her: but on the other hand if France does not love us, we should not love her.'

In the Miliana meeting Bentaieb developed two further popular themes of moderate nationalism. First, that France should respect the Muslim religion, as was promised by treaty at the moment of conquest. A resolution was then passed for the creation of a *medersa* in Miliana, a demand that was certainly linked to the expanding *Ulema* movement. Bentaieb also called on his audience to ensure that their children were educated so that they could aspire to the highest administrative functions. As usual he gave this an anti-French twist by adding that he hoped to see the day when he could go into the *Gouvernement général* in Algiers and be served by Muslims who understood their suffering, rather than as was presently the case by Spanish or French bureaucrats.

By November 1946, at the end of a year that had seen a spectacular nationalist advance, the Miliana administration was concerned at the disturbing electoral campaign run by Bentaieb at a time when the Chelif region was seriously 'contaminated' by extremist movements. In May 1945 General Tubert, a communist sympathizer and Resistant, in a rather extraordinary move, invited Bentaieb to join the commission that de Gaulle's government had appointed to investigate the

[38] AOM 1K/1179, report of the Miliana *commissaire de police*, Bouisson, to the sub-prefect, 9 February 1946.

Sétif massacre.[39] During 1946 Bentaieb was accused of stirring up an aggressive campaign by referring to these events during which, he claimed, 40,000 Muslims had fallen before the English [sic] machine guns: 'He had been an eye-witness of a harrowing spectacle, of corpses being devoured by birds of prey.'[40]

The Miliana administration knew that Bentaieb's campaigning ran the risk of bringing the colonial government into disrepute for its politics of 'béni-oui-ouisme', unless it could dissociate itself from the deputy and unmask 'the swindle against Algerian public opinion'. But Bentaieb seemed irrepressible and caused further controversy by his self-publicizing actions. In July 1947 he wrote to all CM administrators and mayors in the region to ask them to send copies of an extract from the *Journal officiel* containing a speech that he had made, to all *caids*, *djemâas*, and fraction heads.[41] In his speech Bentaieb had appealed to rural populism by asking for an amnesty on all fines and prison sentences relating to forest infractions, cereal hoarding, and violent assaults, a demagogic proposal that he knew would have no chance of success, but which would greatly increase his standing with the rural electorate.

A further tactic of Bentaieb in his search for popular support was to use his powerful position as councillor and deputy to threaten, brow-beat, and humiliate local European officials or *colons* at every opportunity. The object of this exercise was to demonstrate to the Algerian populace that he shared their hatred for the colonial system, but, unlike them, he could use his standing to demonstrate his open contempt for the French by his fearless and aggressive acts of intimidation of *colons* and officialdom. One example of this occurred during a dispute with a wealthy *colon*, Emile Pfister, who had invested a large sum of money in a flock of sheep that was tended on a Bentaieb farm. Bentaieb, Pfister complained to the *Procureur*, had come to his farm and began to insult and threaten him. 'He seemed to enjoy shouting out so loud at my place, in front of the Arabs that I employ, his hostility towards a French person of standing and how he could insult him. He hoped in this way to increase his renown, to extend his popularity, and to pose as a victim in revolt.' To crown it all Bentaieb had shouted, 'The French are our enemies and the enemies of our enemies are our friends'.[42]

Bentaieb was disconcerting to the colonial administration for what one of them called his brazen cheek ['*culot*'], the extent to which he showed no fear in openly threatening senior officials and police officers, whom he frequently outmanoeuvred or undermined by going directly over their heads, often by telephone,

[39] On the Tubert commission, see Jean-Pierre, Peyroulou, *Guelma, 1945: Une subversion française dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 175–9. I can find no record of Bentaieb ever having been a member of the commission.

[40] AOM 1K/1179, report to the prefect of Algiers, Perillier, November 1946.

[41] AOM 1K/1179, Bentaieb to sub-prefect of Miliana, 1 July 1947; sub-prefect to prefect of Algiers, 29 July 1947.

[42] AOM 1K/1179, Emile Pfister to *Procureur de la République*, 24 May 1946.

to his powerful contacts in Algiers and Paris. In a typical instance Bentaieb had called the administrator Beltzunz, whom he later boasted to have driven from office, from a telephone in a café or shop in Affreville so that he could berate the official in the hearing of an appreciative audience.[43]

Bentaieb's public 'anti-French' activities coincided with the period from 1945 to early 1948, during which the nationalists of both Ferhat Abbas's UDMA and Messali Hadj's MTLD made a major electoral breakthrough. But from 1948 to 1954 this nationalist impetus was broken, and then reversed, by the corrupt elections under Governor Naegelen, the retreat of the PPA from elections into clandestine opposition, and its weakening by bitter internal divisions. Bentaieb, like Abdelkader Saiah, reverted to an outward pro-French position that he sustained until the War of Independence, when he changed tack again.

During the period of political immobilism between 1948 and 1954, Bentaieb, a man of modest family origins, had achieved political recognition in Algiers and reinvented himself as a great noble. Bentaieb's elevation to the élite and a self-declared friend of France and the Republic, was symbolized by the vast wedding celebration of his son M'Hamed in June 1949, recently returned from the war in Indochina, which was attended by 2,500 people, including two hundred Europeans, among them high dignitaries from the Algiers government, deputies, colonels, judges, and numerous *caids* and *aghas*.[44] But by 1956 French military intelligence revealed that Bentaieb, like the Saiah, Benbouali, and Bouthiba, was now deeply involved in backing the FLN.

To conclude, the Allied Liberation in late 1942 and the fall of the Vichy regime ushered in a period of rapid political change during which the provisional government led by de Gaulle struggled to contain the explosive growth of nationalism while introducing a new Constitutional order to guarantee the reassertion and stabilization of post-war colonialism. Between 1944 and 1948 the dominant system of Algerian rural government, that of the *Commune mixte*, was challenged from two directions. First, as we will see in the next chapter, under the liberal governor Chataigneau a reform movement attempted to reinstate and reinvigorate colonialism through an interlinked programme of economic and local government reform that would seek to find a developmental solution to the crisis of rural society. One intention of this was to enable the dysfunctional CM and *caidat* system to be abolished, but in reality the Organic Law of September 1947 provided an escape clause through which the traditional system was able to stagger on for another, crucial decade. Ultimately the Algiers government failed to remove the *caids*, and in particular the *grandes familles,* and to replace them by an effective state bureaucracy that could provide the machinery for economic and political

[43] AOM 1K/1179, CM administrator of Djendel to Beltzunz to sub-prefect of Miliana, 28 June 1946.
[44] *Echo d'Alger*, 25 June 1949, which described the wedding as a '*diffa monstre*'.

reform in the *douars*. The leading Algerian politicians in the Chelif, with the backing of the Algiers SLNA, remained suspended between neo-tribal patrimonialism and modern electoral politics. The inherently unstable situation of the rural élite found expression in '*attentisme*', a contradictory position in which they attempted a difficult balancing act between public loyalty to France and private sympathy with rural nationalism.

Even before the terminal crisis of colonialism erupted in November 1954 the rural élites began to splinter and crack under the intense pressure of a mass anti-colonial movement among the peasantry. In March 1953 Nicolle, the administrator of the CM of the Ouarsenis based in Molière, reported with confidence how Abdelkader Saiah, although an absentee from the mountain zone, retained an iron grip on the fraudulent elections and had rebuffed the penetration of PPA-MTLD forces through his coalition mastery of the patrimonial *caid* system.[45] Nicolle informed his superiors what they wished to hear, that the SLNA strategy of managing the *grandes familles* and *caids* was successful in that the peasant masses, even if indifferent to France rather than fervent loyalists, remained tranquil in their isolation from 'the main currents of public opinion and political turbulence'.

But the administrator hedged his bets by adding that such external appearances of tranquillity could be dangerously deceptive since peasant society was capable of erupting into unpredictable violence. In contradiction with his reassuring picture of French domination of mountain society, which appeared to be as secure in 1953 as it had in 1900, was his recognition that the entire system of indirect rule by the *caids* had been hollowed out so that the intelligence state had been rendered blind. 'Our intelligence agents, the field guards and *caids*, who are suspected by the Muslim agitators, are often kept in ignorance of the subversive propagandists. Fearful of reprisals in a dangerous situation, they adopt a reserved and prudent attitude that pushes them to silence. Thus a veritable conspiracy of silence is spreading through the Muslim masses and we have no effective means to combat this danger.'[46]

Even before the 1954 revolt the administration had lost control of the Ouarsenis, a vacuum that enabled the FLN to install its first guerrilla forces with relative ease. Before moving on to examine more closely how this penetration of the communists and Messalists into the rural interior took place between 1944 and 1954, the next chapter turns first to look at how the attempt by a reformist current within the late colonial state to negotiate a resolution to the rural crisis between 1944 and 1948 was blocked by right-wing European interests that aborted a peaceful decolonization process and accelerated the preparation of armed insurrection by the nationalist forces.

[45] AOM 4i206, P. Nicolle, *Monographie politique*, CM Ouarsenis, 1 March 1953. Saiah's electoral domination stemmed, 'as much from his personal prestige as from his alliances [and] makes it possible to exclude from the electoral scene all the rogues and trouble-makers'.

[46] AOM 4i206, P. Nicolle, *Monographie politique*.

5

Lucien Paye's *commune* Reform

The Failure of the Peasant Modernization Programme, 1944–8

The post-war situation of rural society in the Chelif region cannot be understood without some knowledge of the national context. Following the Allied landings in Algeria in November 1942 de Gaulle became head of the Algiers-based *Comité française de Libération nationale* (CFLN) that soon was to become the Provisional Government (GPRF), before its transfer to Paris after the Liberation of 25 August 1944. The fact that the future government of the 4th Republic was located in Algeria for nearly two years meant that leading politicians had a direct experience of the social, economic, and political problems facing the colony and placed it firmly on the agenda. The deepening crisis of the rural economy and the extreme poverty facing the peasants, the majority of inhabitants, was there for all to see, as was the mass surge led by Abbas towards support for an autonomous Algerian republic. De Gaulle was strongly committed to rebuilding the French empire and rather than acknowledging the Atlantic Charter of 14 August 1941 and the right of people to self-determination was prepared to engage in the bloody repression of national liberation movements throughout the empire.[1]

De Gaulle knew that he had to move quickly to head off the growing nationalist movement, and thought that this could be best achieved through a programme of dynamic economic modernization that could offer the vision of a better life within the French imperium, cut the taproot of anti-colonialism, and simultaneously convince the United States and the infant United Nations of the legitimacy of its presence in North Africa. In an important speech in Constantine on 12 December 1943 de Gaulle acknowledged the sacrifice that the Algerian people had made in contributing to the war effort and proclaimed that France would 'honour its contract' by undertaking a veritable renaissance, the 'development of her empire'. Thousands of Algerians, regardless of their status as Muslims ('*statut personnel*') would receive the vote and be given wider access to administrative posts, while there would be an 'absolute and relative improvement in the standard of living

[1] Yves Benot, *Massacres coloniaux 1944–1950: la IVe république et la mise au pas des colonies françaises* (Paris: Maspero, 1994), explores the violent intervention of the French army in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Indochina, Madagascar, and the Ivory Coast.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

of the Algerian masses'.[2] De Gaulle immediately established an important *Commission des réformes* (December 1943 to July 1944) that met in numerous sessions and gathered evidence from a considerable range of senior civil servants, notables, technical experts, and politicians, including the radical nationalist leader Messali Hadj, the communist representative Omar Ouzegane, and Ferhat Abbas.[3]

While the Commission studied a range of developmental issues, from industrialization to housing, the major preoccupation was the parlous state of the peasant economy, and a growing fear, if not panic, over the prospect of a deepening 'Malthusian crisis' in which a demographic explosion threatened to 'submerge' the European minority and to overwhelm any attempt to transform the peasant economy and to increase food production. A considerable volume of official research and data confirmed the fact that Algeria, crucially dependent on cereal production, had during the 1940s passed through the transition to become permanently dependent on grain imports.[4] The Commission was faced with two strategies, one extensive, to increase the surface area under agricultural production, or intensive, to enable peasants to increase yields through use of fertilizers, machinery, and other forms of modern farming. The assumption of the Commission that the government would be able to identify vast tracts of vacant lands to install tens of thousands of peasant families proved to be an illusion, because 'empty' lands tended to be infertile, subject to drought or already occupied, so that 'all that can be cultivated is'.[5] The alternative was to increase peasant productivity through modernization of their traditional farming techniques. Agricultural experts submitted evidence to the Commission that agricultural modernization was not simply a matter of access to land, capital, equipment,

[2] 'Discours prononcé à Constantine par M. le Général de Gaulle', in *Commission chargée d'établir un programme de réformes*, 2.3–5; Guy Pervillé, *La France en Algérie, 1830–1954* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2012), 206, 209–11.

[3] The *Commission chargée d'établir un programme de réformes* (1944), published in two volumes of 549 and 777 pages, includes the minutes of twenty-seven sessions and sub-commissions held between 21 December 1943 and 8 July 1944. Some extracts have been published in Claude Collot and Jean-Robert Henry (eds), *Le mouvement national algérien. Textes 1912–1954* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1978), 171–85. As Guy Pervillé has remarked the Commission has been largely ignored by historians, as has the extent to which the immediate post-war colonial government engaged in a major reform programme, see 'La commission des réformes de 1944 et l'élaboration d'une nouvelle politique algérienne de la France', in Charles-Robert Ageron (ed.), *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l'empire français, 1936–1956* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1986), 357–65, online at: guy.perville.free.fr/spip/article.php3?id_article=120.

[4] The Algiers administration produced a mass of data that confirmed the crisis in food production and supply; see, for example, Arch.Nat. F1A3295, a pamphlet by Balensi, Directeur Général des Affaires Economiques, *Le problème des céréales en Algérie* (*c.*1945), with tables of soft and hard wheat, barley, and oats production from 1851 to 1940 that showed a constant decline in area, yield and per capita consumption. For a detailed historical examination, see Hosni Boukerzaza, 'Croissance démographique et problème alimentaire en Algerie. L'exemple des céréales', *Revue du monde musulmane et de la Méditerranée* 68–9 (1993), 255–63.

[5] In the Chelif, for example, of 2,452 hectares of good agricultural land identified in Teniet el Haad, further investigation showed that 2,308 was already rented to European farmers and another 108 to Algerians, leaving in effective only 38 hectares; *Commissions des réformes*, 2.724.

and improved farming techniques, since the socio-economic and cultural structures of peasant society constituted an integrated whole, a powerful block to change, that would need to be disrupted by a 'shock' treatment. This was to be brought about by mass resettlement into new farming collectives, in which peasants, radically separated from the iron frame of existing socio-cultural patterns, could be re-educated into agrarian modernity.[6] The Commission was strongly influenced by agricultural reform being carried out in Morocco, notably by Corentin Tallec, a highly controversial and authoritarian figure, who through creation of the *Office de l'irrigation* in 1941 pioneered rural resettlement among the Beni Amir tribe that had transformed 'primitive' nomads into successful cash-crop farmers.[7] The idea of an integrated economic and political solution to the rural crisis through resettlement or 'villagization' was soon to be picked up by another Moroccan-based technocrat, Lucien Paye, when he was transferred to Algeria to head the reform programme after May 1945.

De Gaulle's provisional government (GPRF), preoccupied by the Liberation and the urgent move to Paris in August 1944, did little to implement the findings of the Reform Commission, while the *Commissariat aux finances* rejected proposals to finance peasant reform from the Metropolitan budget.[8] This lack of urgency about the Algerian 'peasant question' was, however, abruptly shattered by the combination of the severe famine of 1945 and the aborted rural insurrection and bloody repression of the north Constantinois in May.

Albert Camus during a three-week tour of Algeria in late April and early May 1945 was shocked to witness famine conditions that were worse than those that he had exposed in a series of articles, 'Misère de la Kabylie', in 1939.[9] Camus, under a front-page title, 'The famine in Algeria', explained that stocks of cereals, mainly wheat and barley which constituted the staple in the Algerian diet, had almost run out. A terrible drought had burned the land, 'the soil cracked like a larva field', and 'on all the roads one comes across ragged and emaciated forms. According to the route taken one can see fields that have been dug over and raked in a strange way. This is because entire *douars* have come to dig the earth for a bitter, edible root called "*talrouda*", which, transformed into a stew, gives some sustenance even if does not provide nourishment.'[10] Camus returned to Paris on the eve of the Sétif insurrection and by the time he came to publish his articles a week later, he linked the failure of famine relief to the explosion of peasant revolt and argued it was

[6] *Commission des réformes*, 2.727–41.

[7] *Commission des réformes*, 2.740; W. D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages*, 92–4, 98–102, 111–16. Tallec faced considerable popular resistance led by the nationalists.

[8] G. Pervillé, *La France en Algérie*, 253.

[9] Camus's articles in *Alger républicain* 5 to 15 June 1939 were reprinted in 1958 as *Actuelles III*, and again in *Oeuvres completes d'Albert Camus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 5.309–43.

[10] Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (ed.), *Camus à combat*. Cahiers Albert Camus 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 388–90, 460–2, 475–7. The wild plant *talghuda*, collected by starving peasants, was a standard symbol in anti-colonial discourse.

urgent to resolve this, 'if we wish to prevent the starving masses, agitated by some mad criminals, from recommencing the savage massacres of Sétif'.[11] It was also necessary to carry political reform further, and this represented 'the last chance that France still has to save its future in North Africa'.[12]

Was Camus right to link peasant unrest to famine conditions in Algeria, and in the Chelif in particular?[13] In order to answer this question we need to look first at the way in which the government had since the great depression of the 1930s created a state monopoly in the buying, storing, and distribution of grain, a function handed over to the administrators of the *communes mixtes* that presided over the *Société indigènes de prévoyance* (SIP). The fact that the CM administration controlled not only the *caids*, but also the SIP, the main instrument of economic intervention in the rural economy, helps to explain why it became the target of peasant opposition after 1943.

The *Société indigènes de prévoyance* (SIP): State Intervention and Peasant Entitlement

The SIP, which by the decree of 28 August 1952 was renamed the *Sociétés agricoles de prévoyance* (SAP), was established by the law of 14 April 1893 as an agency by which small farmers and peasants could deposit grain and take out small loans, a mutual aid society that was intended to protect them from the catastrophic impact of usury and land dispossession.[14] The SIPs played an insignificant part in the rural economy until, from the 1930s onwards, their role was greatly expanded until they came to form the key means by which the colonial government intervened in a direct and pragmatic way in the life of small farmers and pastoralists. In particular, measures to protect cereal producers during the great depression of the 1930s led to the establishment of the *Office de blé* that created a state monopoly in grain. In Algeria the SIP were given the task of managing this system through the global storage, transport, and marketing of cereals.

By 1942 the Chelif SIP, with its bureaux in Orleansville, formed a state cooperative which had some 23,745 subscribers, mainly small Algerian farmers.[15]

[11] *Camus à combat*, 506. [12] *Camus à combat*, 529.

[13] The causal links between famine and insurrection have been investigated by Martin Thomas, 'Colonial Minds and Colonial Violence: The Sétif Uprising and the Savage Economics of Colonialism', in M. Thomas (ed.), *The French Colonial Mind*, 2.146–7. My argument is rather different, that mass famine was avoided in 1945 by the global system of food supply and rationing that had been put in place by the Allies during the Second World War.

[14] ANP, CHEAM 20000002/20, M. Charavin, *Les sociétés indigènes de prévoyance en Algérie*, 10 November 1941; Anon., *Le paysanat algérien. Vers la rénovation de l'agriculture traditionnelle par les SAP et leurs SAR* (Algiers: Baconnier, 1955); C.-R. Ageron, *Algériens musulmans*, 2.862–71; J. Bouveresse, *Délégations financières*, 2.192–215.

[15] Information on the Chelif SIP is drawn from a report of an inspector of the SIP, 4 May 1942, reproduced in N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', Appendix 18.

The peasants were encouraged to sell their grain to the SIP that ran seventeen shops located in the *commune* centres and the wheat was stored in modern silos, the largest alongside the railway track at Orleansville. The peasants could apply to the SIP for small loans, or to buy improved strains of seed grain for the next harvest. In a rural society that was particularly vulnerable to periodic drought and locust invasion the SIP came to play the key role in preventing mass starvation and in saving desperate peasants from ruin through the emergency provision of loans and seed-grain. This meant, almost inevitably, that hungry and desperate peasants turned to the SIPS for relief which, as food supplies dwindled and tensions deepened, became the object of anti-government movements led by the PCA and PPA-MTLD. Since the SIP administrative council in each region was controlled by the president, who was also the administrator of the *commune mixte*, along with *douar* representatives from the *caidat* and *djemâa*, this meant that protest movements, demonstrations, and food riots in times of harvest failure tended to become focused on the headquarters of the SIP, which, as in Orleansville, was also the seat of the *commune mixte* administration.

The politicization of the SIP question became particularly clear during the severe famine of 1945 when the colonial government relied on the existing SIP distribution organization, including silos and transport lorries, to manage the global movement of supplies brought into the ports from North America by Allied shipping. As each ship arrived the wheat was transported inland to different locations according to population numbers and from where fixed rations of 300 grammes of bread per day in the towns, and 250 grammes of grain equivalent in the countryside, were distributed.[16] In the towns consumers held ration cards that allowed them to collect their bread from baker's shops, but in the rural areas the supplies were distributed by the SIP.

Grain distribution through the SIPs in the department of Algiers had from September 1944 gone through a steady decline from the official ration of 7.5 kilos per month, to reach 5.1 kilos in December, 3.7 kilos in March, and 2 kilos in April 1945.[17] By March 1945 there was widespread unrest in the countryside that stemmed from the belief that supplies that should have reached the interior were being diverted to European urban populations.[18] The seventeen SIP stores or centres in the Chelif CM were not up to the task of running the distribution

[16] ANP F1A3295, *Sous-direction de l'Algérie*, 12 May 1945, estimated the total requirement for May as 662,000 quintals, made up of 40,000 for the military, 172,000 for the towns (2.3 million bread rations), and 450,000 for the rural areas (6 million wheat rations). The rations were equivalent to only half of the per capita bread or grain consumption to be found in Europe during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries; see Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life* (London: William Collins, 1986), 1.129–33.

[17] ANP F1A3295, report *Sous-direction de l'Algérie*, Paris, 20 April 1945. In March 1945 the per capita distribution in the three departments was 3.7 kilos in Algiers, 5.3 in Oran, and 3.1 in Constantine, indicating major regional variation.

[18] ANP F1A3295, telegramme Governor General to Tixier, 5 April 1945.

network since all but one, at Beni Hindel, were located in the plain or piedmont. Tens of thousands of peasants, lacking any grain reserves, desperately tried to get themselves enrolled on the SIP registers to receive an official ration, not an easy procedure when the nearest depot was several hours walking distance.[19] A CGT report of June 1945 claimed that land workers were receiving rations of only 3 kilos, not the official norm of 7.5 kilos. 'Often they have to walk 20 to 25 kilometres to receive the 3 kilos, and then as far again to return. Some of the starving have died en route without getting their ration and their families have been decimated by famine.'[20] In practice it was not physically possible for the thousands of peasants located in the central Ouarsenis to make frequent, long journeys to claim rations at the SIP stores in the plain. In the *douars* it was the *caids* that acted as intermediaries for the SIP, ensured that families were inscribed on the ration lists, and organized the transport by lorry or mule-train into the interior. Many *caids*, notorious for their exploitation of their *douar* 'clients', seized the opportunity to engage in racketeering at a time when prices were reaching record levels on the black market.

By February 1945, well before the Sétif insurrection, food shortage was beginning to bite and popular anger was increasingly directed against the ration and distribution networks, in particular the urban headquarters of the CM, the associated SIPs, bakers, and local depots. On 13 February a major riot erupted in the small town of Djemila, north-east of Sétif, when up to 1,500 people attacked SIP officials and the *caid* during a distribution of wheat rations. The house of the *caid* Ahmed Chérif Benachour, accused of taking money in order to put individuals on the ration lists, was damaged, and several officials were wounded by a hail of stones.[21] In a significant development, a growing number of street demonstrations were organized by large crowds of women, described as 'housewives'. On 1 March some two thousand women protested in Tiaret outside the town hall against the failure of the ration system, and on 6 March in Oran, during a visit of the Governor General, two thousand women shouted '*du pain! du pain!*'.[22]

On 30 March a police patrol in Orleansville came under fire, and street riots erupted twice in April. On 9 April a crowd of about two hundred people gathered but after a speech by the sub-prefect Plait, interpreted to the crowd by the aristocratic Abdelkader Saiah, they dispersed.[23] A week later on 16 April a much

[19] ANP Fla3295, Moreuil, *Délégation de la direction général des affaires économiques*, Rapport sur le ravitaillement de l'Algérie en blé pour la campagne 1944–1945, 13 June 1945, provides the clearest account of the complexities of the rationing system. He estimated that by the end of the agricultural year, 1,150,000 individuals would need to be enrolled on the SIP ration lists.

[20] ANP F1a3293, report sent by H. Raynaud, Secrétaire CGT to Tixier, 21 June 1945.

[21] ANP F1a3295, letter of *Procureur général* Algiers Appeal Court to the *Garde de sceaux*, 26 February 1945. Six men were arrested, including a rich man Lakhdar ben Mohammed Bellala, a leader who was accused of inciting a riot against the *caid* in order to increase his own electoral support.

[22] Mahfoud Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien. Question nationale et politique algérienne, 1919–1951* (Algiers: SNED, 1980–1), 2.696–7.

[23] N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 316.

larger and more aggressive crowd of five hundred men, women, and children that according to the sub-prefect had arrived from the proletarian suburbs of La Ferme and the shanty town of Bocca Sahnoun gathered in the morning outside the sub-prefecture and demanded an increase in the size of the rations. They refused to disperse and in the afternoon proceeded to attack three bakeries. The local police and gendarmerie, pelted with stones by the crowd, were unable to restore order, and it took the arrival of a unit of infantrymen to clear the streets. The sub-prefect claimed that the crowds had been orchestrated by a core of nationalists, which seems quite likely since among the men arrested was a driver-mechanic, chauffeur to the president of the local section of the AML, Cheik Brahimi.[24]

Food riots or street protests were, in general, a feature of urban rather than rural society, and received the support of the landless proletariat that inhabited the peripheral shanty towns, but peasants from the surrounding areas were also drawn into these movements. The bureaux of the CM, the SIPs, and the *caids* were located in the towns and rural inhabitants, in the absence of agents of the state in the sparsely inhabited interior, focused their discontent on the most visible symbols of administrative power in the towns, in particular on market days when thousands of peasants might congregate.

The Governor responded to the growing wave of discontent through an order of 31 March that established local *Comités de vigilance économique* that had both European and Algerian representatives and were intended to ensure strict equity in the distribution system. The committees could investigate whether census, harvest, and stock returns were accurate.[25] The government was aware that it faced a deepening crisis in which the populace was mobilized not simply by hunger, but by perceptions of injustice, of systematic corruption, or incompetence in the administration. The ration system had generated new forms of 'consumer consciousness' and entitlement in which the urban and rural poor could measure the operations of the distribution network against a quantifiable benchmark, the daily fixed ration allowance that was widely announced in the press.

As Frank Trentman has shown, global rationing during the Second World War led to a remarkable shift in popular culture towards new forms of consumer politics. The concept of an individual ration, a total food package, rather than a system of maximum wartime prices, meant that nutritional scientists were able to set standard units of consumption, defined in terms of calories, vitamins, and proteins. This enabled an 'integrated global understanding of food security' in which the individual ration provided a universally applicable standard or

[24] ANP F60/872, *Procureur général* of Algiers to *Garde de sceaux*, 1 May 1945; N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 316–18.

[25] ANP F1a3295, 'Création en Algérie de comités de vigilance economique' (undated note); *Journal Officiel de l'Algérie*, 3 April 1945, text of *arrêté* of 31 March 1945. Committees were appointed at the level of the department, *arrondissement*, CPE, and CM, and were to include, among others, trade union and agricultural representatives.

benchmark, against which different societies or classes could measure their own position.[26]

This transition can be seen at work in the mid-Chelif, a change that can be measured by the difference between the 1920 and 1945 famines in the region. In 1920 the colonial administration in Orleansville responded to the food crisis, just as it had during the nineteenth century, by ad hoc arrangements that included soup kitchens and charitable relief work. Untold numbers of starving peasants died in roadside ditches. Hungry bands of peasants, including recently demobbed soldiers, attacked farmhouses, lorry transports, and shops, but there is no record of any form of urban food riots. By 1945 the situation had changed significantly. The system of state food control was far more sophisticated and, although a hiatus in Allied shipping supplies between January and May 1945 caused widespread hunger, the population never tipped over into mass starvation and mortality. Indeed, given that the harvest failure of 1945 was worse than that of 1920, it could be argued that the Allied supply system, despite its faults, served to prevent widespread death.[27]

The rioters in Orleansville, as in other urban centres, in March and April 1945 were protesting at the failure of the authorities to distribute adequate rations, a per capita allowance that was known to every Algerian. The nationalists, through their propaganda, seized every opportunity to attack the gap between the official norms of food supply and the reality on the ground. In this sense anti-colonial tension can be described as one deriving from a moral economy, in the sense pioneered by the historian E. P. Thompson.[28] The eighteenth-century 'mob' viewed their riotous actions as legal, a defence of the ancient laws in the marketing of cereals that were being eroded by liberal capitalism. Likewise the political radicalization of the Algerian urban poor and peasantry after 1945, as we will see later, was fuelled by a moral economy in which protesters were activated by a sense of entitlement.[29]

Frederick Cooper has shown in detail how from the 1930s through to the 1950s imperial governments turned towards new forms of development policy to resolve the crisis faced by late colonialism. Great Britain through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, and France with the *Fonds d'investissement et de développement économique et social* (FIDES) of 1946, 'moved decisively

[26] Frank Trentmann, 'Coping with Shortage: The Problem of Food Security and Global Visions of Coordination, *c*.1890s–1950', in Frank Trentmann and Flemming Just (eds), *Food and Conflict in Europe in the Age of the Two World Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13–48.

[27] In general mass starvation, like that faced in Bangladesh in 1943, was generated by failures of transport and distribution; see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

[28] E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 76–136.

[29] James C. Scott, 'Moral Economies, State Spaces, and Categorical Violence', *American Anthropologist* 107.3 (2005), 395–402, notes how the guaranteeing of peasant subsistence passed from the lord or patron to the 'moral economy state' so that provision of adequate social insurance transcends local reciprocity and is assumed as 'a right of citizenship'.

to embrace the developmental framework in an effort to reinvigorate and relegitimize empire as it was being challenged by nationalist movements, labor militance, and increased questioning of colonial rule'.[30] The deepening pre-insurrectionary crisis in Algeria after 1943 was fuelled not only by the nationalist response to savage repression but also, contradictory as it may seem, by perceptions of failed reform and broken promises.

Historian have focused on the processes by which de Gaulle set about concealing the extent of state repression and massacre in the Constantinois, and little has been said about how Adrian Tixier, the dynamic Minister of the Interior, responded to the crisis by initiating an important, but little understood, change in direction in the Algiers government, a reform masterminded by Lucien Paye.[31] Even before Sétif Tixier was frustrated and angry at the failings of the colonial administration and was determined to shake up the conservative establishment in Algiers that had singularly failed since the 1930s to bring about necessary reforms.[32] Augustin Berque was pensioned off when the *Direction des affaires musulmanes* was abolished on 8 September 1945 and replaced by a *Direction des réformes* headed by Lucien Paye.[33]

In June 1945 Tixier rapidly toured the Constantinois where the Gaullists were attempting, with some success, to draw a veil over the massacre. At the conclusion of his tour Texier announced a 'vast programme of economic and social reform based on the proposals put forward by the *Commission des réformes musulmanes*'.[34] In his Algiers speech Tixier sketched out his proposal to reform education, public health, and social security, to provide land for the peasants, and to achieve the democratization of local government based on the *djemâas* and SIPs. Through involvement in the rural *commune*, it was suggested, peasants would gain a practical education in governance, the 'most effective school in practical democracy'.[35] Within weeks of Sétif, Tixier was sketching out what was to become the central strategy of the regime in Algeria as it fought to cling to colonial power between 1945 and 1962, a project centred on the transformation of peasant society. In September 1945 the *Affaires musulmanes* that had dominated the system of rural management since the nineteenth century was swept aside as

[30] Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

[31] Adrien Tixier (1893–1946) served as de Gaulle's representative in Washington from November 1941 and worked on social security reform in the Algiers CFLN before becoming Minister of the Interior in September 1944, coinciding with the appointment of the liberal Yves Chataigneau as Governor on 8 September 1944, a position he held until 11 February 1948.

[32] M. Thomas, 'Colonial Minds', 146–7, on Tixier's discontent.

[33] Tixier, in a telegramme to Chataigneau, 31 May 1945, proposed the appointment of Paye while Berque was to be put pensioned off: ANP. F/Ia/3293. G. Pervillé, *La France en Algérie*, 355, 358, Tixier announced he had chosen in Paye, 'a young man who knows North Africa and the Muslim problem well, and is a strong supporter of [de Gaulle's] Ordonnance of 7 March 1944'.

[34] See J. P. Peyroulou, *Guelma 1945*, for detail on Tixier's investigation. Tixier announced the reform on Radio Alger on 30 June 1945 (text in Archives Nationales Pierrefitte (ANP), F60/872), and in the *Assemblée consultative* on 18 July 1945.

[35] Radio Alger, 30 June 1945.

Lucien Paye arrived in Algiers to head the new *Direction des réformes* and to find a new solution to the 'peasant question'.

Lucien Paye and the *Direction des réformes*, 1945–8

Lucien Paye (1907–72), a figure who has been largely overlooked by historians, is of considerable importance in the history of Algeria since between 1945 and 1948, and 1956 and 1958, he designed a sophisticated development model that underpinned official thinking and provided a strategy to provide a technocratic solution to the colonial crisis. Paye, appointed in 1937 *Directeur d'instruction musulmane* in Morocco, was a brilliant young specialist of Maghreb society and Muslim education, and was to have a distinguished career after the Algerian War as Minister of Education (1961–2), the first French ambassador to Communist China (1964–9), and President of the commission of reform of the broadcasting service ORTF (1968–70). After graduation from the *École normal supérieure* he moved to Morocco in 1931 to teach in a lycée at Fez, and quickly established a reputation as a distinguished scholar and arabicist.[36] Paye was typical of a generation of brilliant scholars and administrators, among them Jacques Berque, Roger Le Tourneau, and Jean Dresch, that developed the sociology, anthropology, and political science of Morocco during the 1930s, many of them under the intellectual wing of Robert Montagne.[37] Montagne, a former naval officer, carried out extensive fieldwork in Morocco during 1926 to 1930 for his influential thesis on the Berbers of the High Atlas, before creating in 1937 the *Centre de hautes études d'administration musulmane* (CHEAM) in Paris that provided a think tank in which university academics, and active colonial administrators and military officers, many on three-month secondment, could exchange ideas on every aspect of policy in the Maghreb and Middle East.[38]

[36] See an interview with Lucien Paye's son, Jean-Claude Paye, 28 March 2013 <http://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=20&rub=portraits&item=25>; and Julie Barny, 'Un fonctionnaire colonial au Maroc: l'expérience de Lucien Paye', masters, Paris 1, 2012.

[37] Many of Paye's essays on education, housing, demography, agriculture, political reform, and industry are located in the CHEAM archives, Archives Nationales (Pierrefitte). One irony in Paye's replacement of Augustin Berque is that he was much influenced in his thinking on rural reform by the latter's son, Jacques Berque, who with Julien Couleau launched a large-scale experiment in collective farming in Morocco, the *Secteur de modernisation du paysannat* (SMP). Jacques Berque and Julien Couleau summarized their plan in an influential article, 'Vers la modernisation du fellah Marocain', *Bulletin Economique et Social du Maroc* 26 (1945), 18–26; Julien Couleau, *La paysannerie marocaine* (Paris: CNRS, 1968). For an assessment, see Pierre Marthelot, 'Histoire et réalité de la modernisation du monde rural au Maroc', *Tiers-Monde* 2.6 (1961), 137–68, p. 137; Stephane Bernard, *Le conflit franco-marocain 1943–1956* (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie, University of Brussels, 1963), 3.61–8; W. D. Swearingen, *Moroccan Mirages*, 125–31; and Réné Dumont, *Types of Rural Economy: Studies in World Agriculture* (London: Methuen, 1970), 191–6.

[38] On Montagne and the CHEAM, see his CV in ANP 19960480/16; James McDougall, 'Rule of Experts? Governing Modernisation in Late Colonial French Africa', in Ed Naylor (ed.), *France's Modernising Mission: Citizenship, Welfare and the Ends of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 87–108; François Pouillon, Daniel Rivet (eds), *La sociologie musulmane de Robert Montagne*

In a long letter to his mentor Robert Montagne in September 1938 Paye, who as the newly appointed director of education had visited three-quarters of all the schools in Morocco, began to outline his thinking on the problems facing the colony. In the next twenty-five to thirty years, he remarked, the population of Morocco would double, the masses would face unheard of difficulties, and bring France 'multiple dangers'. Since three-quarters of the population lived on the land, agrarian reform was essential, but this could not be carried out by peasants who were psychologically bound to traditional ways, and the long-term solution had to be sought in a massive expansion and reform of state education that would equip the future generation through a 'psychological and technological education'.[39] Here we can see, in embryo, a sketch of Paye's future agenda as Director of Reform, a liberal and technocratic vision of political and economic modernization that would rescue French North Africa from the threat of revolutionary Islamic nationalism.

Paye, the *eminence grise* of the colonial government, picked up on the ideas of Robert Montagne, Jacques Berque, and other Moroccan colleagues, and integrated them into an ambitious strategy, a fine-tuned political-economic 'orchestration' that laid the basis for the first Algerian five-year plan (1947–51). On 10 November 1945 the government created a *Conseil supérieures des réformes* that began the task, assisted by various sub-committees, including the *Commission du paysannat*, to prepare detailed plans for every aspect of the colony, from industrialization to education and social welfare.[40] In January 1946 Lucien Paye provided a report to the Governor Chataigneau on the overall reform strategy that was highly innovative in the way in which a solution to the seemingly intractable problems of political reform and democratization, and of agrarian modernization, was sought through an integrated framework.[41]

Tixier had appointed Lucien Paye because he fully supported de Gaulle's Ordinance of 7 March 1944, the key policy statement on the post-war order. This appeared to open the door to full integration of Algerians by making them fully equal in rights and duties to French citizens while retaining their personal

(Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 2000); Noara Omouri, 'Les sections administratives spécialisées et les sciences sociales', in Jean-Charles Jauffret and Maurice Vaisse (eds), *Militaires et guérilla dans la guerre d'Algérie* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2001), 383–97.

[39] ANP 19960480/16, Lucien Paye to Robert Montagne, 3 September 1938, 16 pp.

[40] Much of the documentation of the Commissions, including the minutes of the *Paysannat*, can be found in the CHEAM archives, ANP 19960480/8.

[41] ANP 19960480/8. Lucien Paye to Governor General, *Rapport sur les réformes réalisées ou envisages pour 1946*, 17 January 1946, 43 pp. Paye provided a later version in a booklet, *Du douar-commune à la commune rurale* (Algiers: Guiauchain, 1948), a publication of the *Centre d'études economiques et sociales de l'Afrique française*, of which Paye was vice president, and Robert Montagne one of the administrators.

legal rights as Muslim (*statut personnel*). Algerians were given equality of opportunity to all levels of civil and military employment.[42] Most important politically was the recognition that Algerians were French citizens, 'registered on the same electoral lists', but within this bold declaration of principle lay a carefully concealed formula to block the extension of full voting rights to all Algerians, and in particular the nationalists, who outnumbered Europeans by nine to one and would inevitably lead to the loss of the colony.

The key challenge facing the Gaullists in post-Liberation Algeria was how to engineer an electoral system, an undemocratic democracy, that could be defended in the republican language of universal rights, while in reality it guaranteed the political domination of the European minority. Through the 7 March Ordinance, de Gaulle pre-empted the work of the Constituent Assembly and the Organic Law of 20 September 1947, by entrenching European political domination through retention of the system of separate European and Algerian chambers.[43]

The great fear of the *colons* right, shared by the Gaullists, was less the extension of the Algerian franchise to all urban males, but to the millions of peasants in the interior, a fear that was accentuated by the rapid extension of the nationalist movement into the *douars* during 1944 to 1947. Paye's mentor Robert Montagne, a highly influential adviser to the Algerian government, wrote in 1944 that what must be avoided at all costs was 'the torrent of Algerians entering, without any distinction, into the *cité*', leading to a 'complete submersion of the French order'.[44] Montagne's solution fell back on the standard conservative response to electoral reform in Europe since the eighteenth century that extension of the franchise to the uneducated and 'great unwashed', should be delayed until they were sufficiently educated to exercise such a right in a rational way, a position that had the advantage of appearing to accept the principle of a universal franchise while relegating it into an indeterminate future.[45]

Paye, who may well have been appointed Director of Reform on the advice of Montagne, orchestrated a sophisticated version of this strategy by a policy that set out to achieve the socio-economic modernization of rural Algeria as a precondition of long-term electoral equality. This was to be achieved through a reform of local government in which the rural masses could undergo an apprenticeship in politics through the creation of rural *communes*, 'veritable embryonic municipal

[42] For the text of the Ordonnance of 7 March 1944, see G. Pervillé, *La France*, 230–3.

[43] ANP 19960480/8, a folder of 'Réactions orientales et panarabes', shows widespread opposition in the Arab world, from Egypt and Palestine, to Syria and Yemen, to the 7 March Ordinance. The reply of Ferhat Abbas to the Ordinance was to found, one week later, the *Ami du Manifeste et de la liberté* (AML) that made the first nationalist electoral breakthrough in favour of an autonomous Algerian Republic federated to 'a renewed anti-colonial and anti-imperial French Republic': G. Perville, *La France*, 233–4.

[44] G. Pervillé, *La France*, 259–60.

[45] G. Pervillé, *La France*, 260, Montagne conjectured that such a reform would take thirty years and not be completed until *c.*1974, i.e. over a decade after the end of the Algerian War!

cells', that would serve as 'excellent schools of political freedom'.[46] The new *communes* could be built upon the foundations of the official *douar-djemâa* that already had a long, legal existence since the *sénatus-consulte* of 1863, and that had received various modifications through the 1919 'Jonnart law', and the decree of 25 August 1937 that had created experimental *centres municipales* in Kabylia.[47] The new bodies would possess most of the qualities of the metropolitan *commune*, with an elected council under a Mayor, and would possess full legal powers to own property, act in law, and control a budget.[48]

However, existing *douar-communes* and *djemâas* would not be all converted into rural *communes* at a single point in time, but only earn the right after each one had demonstrated sufficient economic and social progress to be able to run their own affairs. Local government reform would, in this perspective, be inevitably a long-term and piecemeal process and would depend on the prior modernization of the rural economy, the investment in roads, electrification, schools, health centres, and other infrastructures. As the rural *communes* assumed responsibility for their own governance, so the existing *communes mixtes* and *caidat* would dissolve away, and, as with the metropolitan French village, they would fall under the guidance of the prefects and sub-prefects.

This was a political revolution that would work from the bottom up by peasants gaining experience of a democratic culture at the grass roots by direct involvement in village governance, learning how to accept responsibility for making decisions relating to the community, managing small budgets and communal property, and mediating between conflicting interests.[49] The idea was attractive in the extent to which it recognized an organic or integral link between socio-economic and political change. Chataigneau, in a circular of 8 February 1946, summed up the purpose of the reform: 'It is not necessary to insist on the capital role that the *djemâas* must play in the social and political formation of the rural inhabitants. They constitute veritable schools in civic education where the French muslims, in a cadre that they know perfectly, will bring to the study of local problems the pragmatic sense that comes from contact with concrete realities.'

A second key element of the Paye reform was to transfer impoverished peasants from the archaic system of farming in which they were entrenched into large collective farms that were to be located on communal or domain lands that had been identified through a massive government search and registration of all

[46] ANP 19960480/8, L. Paye, *Rapport sur les réformes*, 17 January 1946.

[47] L. Paye, *Du douar-commune*, 10–15; see also A. Mahé, *Histoire de la Grande Kabylie*, 390–415.

[48] L. Paye, *Du douar-commune*, 11. Paye extended the powers of the *djemâa-commune* through his decree of 29 August 1945.

[49] Paye's reform reflected a wider trend in colonial policy. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (Oxford: John Curret, 1992), 2.246, remark that, 'During the first post-war decade, the foundation of British policy for African political development was the use of local government as a school for education in democracy, political responsibility and social service. This was supposed to supply the necessary basis for eventual African advancement to self-government.'

potentially free properties. The *Commission du paysannat* reported in January 1946 on a number of experimental collective farms that were already established to test the organization and financing of such projects.[50] In line with the Moroccan *Secteur de modernisation du paysannat* (SMP) the relocation of peasants into jointly managed collectives was designed to lever them from the iron frame of traditionalism, and to achieve similar access to finance, cooperatives, and modern productive technologies as those available to large colons estates. In this way Paye planned to kill two birds with one stone: to resolve the Malthusian crisis of a starving peasantry, and at the same time to facilitate their education and apprenticeship into a more democratic system. The Paye project seemed to find an elegant solution to the conundrum of political reform by ensuring that social and economic modernization was not separated off from constitutional change, but became an integral part of a process of democratization. Through elected *comités de gestion* at the level of the fraction or *djemâa*, peasants would be running their own affairs, managing communal lands and cooperatives, investing in tractors, building schools, new housing, and medical centres, piping in fresh water, and constructing roads. In this nursery of democracy, more concrete and meaningful to peasants, it was claimed, than voting for the abstract programmes of political parties, or the false lure of nationalism, the peasantry would acquire a basic political education that would prepare them for a later extension of the franchise. In this sense it can be seen how far Paye's thinking about reform was a precursor, in all but name, of later developmental theories that recognized the vital links between forms of social organization, patriarchy, gender, inheritance customs, and rural modernization as an integrated field.

Julien Rohrbacher and the *Plan d'action communale* in the Chelif

So far we have focused on the elaboration of the government reform strategy at the centre: what remains is to investigate the question of how far Paye's project impacted at the local level through a case study of the Chelif. On 18 April 1946 Chataigneau sent the prefects copies of a circular by which, sub-prefects, mayors, CM administrators, and technicians were to take part in the *Plan d'action communale* (PAC), a vast enquiry that would provide a detailed picture of each *douar* and provide the base for the first five-year plan for the reconstruction of the

[50] ANP 19960480/8 minutes *Commission du paysannat*, 22 January 1946, debated various projects, among them an experiment at Ouled Laaba in which a hundred peasant families that owned little, if any land, were to have access to an additional 576 hectares of communal land, while an estimated budget of 15 millions would finance construction of a new village and school, loans for livestock, seed, and machinery, all under the supervision of technicians from the *Direction des services agricoles*.

rural interior.[51] Replies were to follow a standard format that included reports on the state of local administration and basic services and infrastructures, including the *paysannat*, housing, urban development, water supply, electrification, education, roads and communication, public health, and agriculture, and provide assessment or recommendations for future investment. The PAC returns, which have been little used by historians, represented the single most ambitious attempt in late colonial Algeria to carry out a total survey of the economic and social conditions of rural society, and provides a valuable insight at the micro-level into the situation in the interior prior to the 1954 revolution.[52]

Space does not allow a full study of the PACs return made by Julien Rohrbacher, administrator of the CM of Chelif, but I focus on one issue, that of housing and public works, to illustrate the wider process. Rohrbacher's reports convey a strong sense not only of the endemic poverty of the peasant condition, but also of the terminal crisis and retreat of official colonization in the interior, a crisis marked by the physical decay of the small *colons* centres at Molière, Lamartine, Bougainville, Malakoff, Massena, and Warnier, and their declining population. The standard colonial narrative depicted the *colons* villages as well-endowed settlements that, parasitic on the taxes garnered from Algerian peasants, enjoyed lavish municipal facilities, from bandstands, parks, and public halls to post offices and health centres. By contrast the PACs reports on the small townships of the Ouarsenis and Dahra give a depressing picture of the crisis of official colonization, settler depopulation, and the decay of state buildings, schools, town halls, post offices, and clinics, as well as water and sewerage systems.

At Lamartine, despite a considerable state investment, the infant colony had a sickly existence, and the European population had declined from 133 in 1921 to ninety-nine in 1926. Rohrbacher recorded a sorry state of affairs in Bougainville where a number of families had departed in the face of the severe 1920 drought that led to widespread famine and insecurity. By 1946 a mere eighty-three Europeans remained, living alongside 163 Algerians, agricultural labourers who inhabited 'miserable *gourbis*'. The reports of the administrator were tinged with pessimism and nostalgia for a golden past when centres like Malakoff and Lamartine were 'very pretty villages perfectly planned and maintained with a lively concern for elegance'.

The PACs report on peasant housing provides a detailed picture of the cramped, unhealthy, and primitive condition of the *gourbis* in which 65 per cent

[51] The PAC returns are to be found for each CM at AOM 1Y109 to 1Y114. Although missing for many *communes*, that for the CM of Chelif (1Y113) includes detailed files for every *douar*, as well as reports by technical experts in the sub-prefecture on the key topics, from housing to electrification, as well as the recommendations of the administrator Julien Rohrbacher for future investment and reconstruction.

[52] The journalist René Peiber in the right-wing *Journal d'Alger*, 23–4 February 1947, sardonically attacked the PAC as an abstract exercise that would generate 16,800 dossiers that he estimated would take Paye's Direction a year to study.

of the rural population lived. The walls were constructed of a mud and straw conglomerate shaped between wooden moulds and roofed with straw or diss thatch. Without windows or chimneys, the interiors were dark, humid, and full of acrid smoke. The medical report described 'the foul-smelling and uncomfortable *gourbis* thatched with diss or straw, located near piles of dung or rubbish tips. Even the most basic forms of hygiene are ignored: cuts are exposed to pathogenic germs.'[53] The solution to this was sought, as it had been so often over the previous century, in the design of a standardized house of a 'European' type, with windows, a chimney, pantile roof, WC, and other amenities that could be constructed at low cost using local materials and labour.[54]

However, the analysis of the proposals for the future planning of peasant housing reveals the extent to which intervention in one sector, was impeded by the complex interrelationship with a global 'underdevelopment'. Building programmes were hampered by the local shortage of skilled labour. While the CM architect Voyer could draw on the assistance of three or four engineers, there was a lack of skilled artisans such as masons to carry out the work and new schools of apprenticeship would have to be opened at Orleansville or Bou Caid before building programmes could get underway. The lack of skilled labour was, in turn, linked to the high level of illiteracy and an almost universal absence of schools in the central Ouarsenis. Plans for the future expansion of schools in turn involved a building programme that was hamstrung by shortage of masons, and it was difficult to recruit teachers because accommodation was so primitive and, without electrification, were dependent during winter nights on oil or carbide lamps.[55]

The expansion of model housing was impeded even more by budgetary constraints. Rohrbacher, well aware that central funds were lacking during a period of post-war austerity, provided cheese-paring estimates as to how construction of new housing could be financed.[56] Peasants would be encouraged to build their own houses and to quarry local gravel or stone, through voluntary or *corvées* labour, although it was known from experience that compulsory work gangs were disliked by the rural population and led to very poor-quality construction. In addition, although some central funds could be sought, Rohrbacher estimated that most of the costs, especially of building materials, would be carried by the peasant occupants through future rent or mortgage repayments. In effect a peasantry that was living on the edge of permanent malnutrition was being asked to self-finance

[53] AOM 1Y113, *assistance médicale et sociale*, 3 August 1946.

[54] When Lucien Paye visited Bou Caid in early 1946 he was able to inspect two model houses of this type being constructed by Rohrbacher's deputy administrator Nicolle.

[55] Yves Roux, a newly qualified teacher, provides a graphic account of the extraordinarily harsh conditions he faced when first posted to the *douar* of Beni Rached in the Dahra in 1952. His friend Pierre, newly married, refused to remain in his post; see Ahmed Ghouati, *École et imaginaire dans l'Algérie coloniale. Parcours et témoignages* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 20–3.

[56] D. Lefeuvre, *Chère Algérie*, ch. 9, 'Les contraintes de l'après-guerre', on the budget crisis.

its own 'modernization'. In the five-year plan Rohrbacher estimated that a total of ninety new houses would be built between 1947 and 1950, a number that barely touched the problem of the estimated 85,000 peasants living in *gourbis*.

The ruinous state of the centres of colonization clearly depressed the erudite Rohrbacher who saw in them a symbol of the cyclical rise and fall that was the fate of all great empires. 'Finally universal history reveals a general law by which imperialists finally decline after a greater or lesser period of time'. However, 'the universal law of disintegration' could be overcome by a strong active will, and here Rohrbacher, with literary references to Jean Giraudoux, Paul Claudel, and Le Corbusier, attempted to lighten his gloomy report by the utopian vision of a future ultra-modern Algeria. At Bou Caid, in the heart of the Ouarsenis mountains: 'Let us wish for a future "*ville radieuse*" as imagined by Le Corbusier with 85% of the surface planted and an even more beautiful green belt where the tree will reign without the forest guard having to be ever-vigilant and the Arab goat cannot feed…'. Rohrbacher's dream was of a splendid urban world in the Ouarsenis that would be free from troublesome peasants and their flocks of goats that devastated the magnificent domain forests.

When Rohrbacher turned to list in detail the projects of 'urbanism' that should be undertaken during the five-year plan, it is striking how much of the small budget, far from enabling the expansion of new building projects of peasant housing, had to be set aside to repair or replace existing state properties in the urban centres that had been allowed to fall into ruin.[57] As in the past priority was given to the Europeans through investment in new buildings and infrastructures, such as lodgings for officials, sewers, or tarmac roads in the townships, which made little if any difference to the lives of the tens of thousands of impoverished peasants who lived beyond the perimeter of colonization. The detail of the PACs reveals an extraordinary gap between the government ambition to bring about the economic transformation of rural society, and the paltry proposals that were tabled, and their bias towards the *colons*.

For Rohrbacher and Lucien Paye there was an underlying technocratic and political logic in the priority given to urban planning over the *bled*, the fundamental need to tackle the issue of dispersed settlement. As we have seen, sedentarization of agro-pastoralists had become almost universal in the Chelif by the 1930s, but peasant houses were widely scattered across the landscape. By 1945 Paye and the *Paysannat* Commission were beginning to pick up on the new forms of technocratic planning in France, the *aménagement du territoire*, pioneered by post-war geographers, urban planners, and agronomists, for the rational planning

[57] Lucien Paye, *Rapport sur les réformes*, 17 January 1946, estimated that the five-year plan should have a budget of 200 millions (old francs) for rehousing Algerians in urban slums or *bidonvilles*, but only 100 millions for replacement of rural *gourbis*, although the population of the latter was far higher. The global sum was tiny.

of a balanced national space and economy.[58] Farming in metropolitan France was split geographically between the zones of modern farming, and a sector of millions of small peasants trapped in traditional forms of subsistence agriculture and low productivity. A major problem facing structural reform was that tens of thousands of rural *communes* that had been undergoing depopulation since the mid-nineteenth century, had sunk below a demographic threshold that made it economically viable to sustain basic services, from the village school and doctor to artisans, bakers and grocers, as well as key infrastructures like metalled roads, electrification, and piped water. The deepening crisis further accelerated the flight of young people towards the cities.[59] Planners studied, and calculated, the enormous additional costs of constructing electricity grids or piped water systems to reach hundreds of isolated farmhouses, as opposed to those grouped into villages. The new forms of rural technocratic planning had an influence on the Algerian administration in its attempt to resolve the crisis facing peasant society.[60]

In January 1946 the national *Commission du paysannat* discussed the problem of those regions in which 'the farms are scattered or grouped in small *mechtas*'. But the logic of the new collective farms dictated a programme of 'villagization', the displacement of peasants from their isolated *gourbis* into groups of about a hundred households. Such centralization carried numerous benefits that were listed as the provision of good roads, improved public transport, and access to markets, piped water supplies, electrification, good schools close to the pupils' homes, an administrative centre with public buildings, post office, telephones, and dispensary, and a social life in which peasants could discuss and share their problems, 'intimately involved in communal life'.[61]

The PACs reports for the Chelif picked up on the issue of a dispersed population, scattered through a vast and isolated mountain terrain. Each of the twenty-six *douars* was subdivided into 291 clan-like communities or fractions (*boccas*) that had, on average, 439 inhabitants divided into seventy families (see Table 1, p. 58). These, noted Rohrbacher, 'are far from constituting a compact agglomeration but rather a loose gathering of a dispersed kind spread over broken terrain', in which each farmhouse was separated from its neighbours. Such dispersal was

[58] A key text was Jean-François Gravier's, *Paris et le désert français: décentralisation, équipement, population* (Paris: Le Portalan, 1947).

[59] Jean Pitié, *Exode rural et migrations intérieures en France. L'exemple de la Vienne et du Poitou-Charente* (Poitiers: NORIS, 1971), provides one of the best studies of this rural crisis; on dispersed settlement and planning, see I. B. Thomas, *Modern France: Social and Economic Geography* (London: Butterworths, 1970), ch. 3 'Rural Settlement'.

[60] One influence on planners in Algeria was Gaston Bardet (1907–89), who had developed ideas on 'urbanisme rural' in the 1930s, was involved in the *aménagement* of Corsica (1941–3) and Avignon (1945–6), and was later director of the *Institut international et supérieur d'urbanisme appliquée* in Brussels from 1947 to 1973. He taught courses on the 'new urbanism' in many countries, including Algeria in 1945; on Bardet, see Samia Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2017), 195.

[61] ANP 19960480/8 minutes *Commission du paysannat*, 23 January 1946.

seen as a major impediment to any kind of rational planning and modernization, the *aménagement* of rural space.

Rohrbacher put forward proposals for the grouping of the dispersed population of the *boccas* into villages of two hundred to five hundred inhabitants that was to take place over the next five years. Such centralization had to take place *before* there could be any investment in infrastructures such as schools, piped water, roads, and model housing, a policy that effectively put on hold any improvement of peasant conditions in the *douars*. Quite crucially, however, the ideology of village grouping was propelled less by economic and technocratic considerations than by a political strategy of communal reform. Rohrbacher followed Paye's directive that peasants were not to be immediately enfranchised to take over municipal government, but had to undergo a transitional political apprenticeship through involvement in the civics of cooperatives, school building, and other projects. After a preparatory phase each *douar* would be allowed to progress to the status of a *commune rurale*, a halfway stage to becoming a fully fledged *commune*. The conservative Rohrbacher seized on this agenda to block implementation of any plans for the immediate extension of political rights.

In his final PACs report Rohrbacher summarized his recommendations for each *douar* and, in almost every instance, he suggested that promotion to *commune* status be delayed until progress had been made in villagization and education. For example, he recorded for the *douar* Ouazane, 'The promotion of the *douar* to the status of a muncipal centre or rural *commune* is not possible owing to general illiteracy and the dispersal of the *boccas*'. Likewise plans for Tsighaout should be delayed until after *regroupement* and 'when the inhabitants have a sufficient level of education to be able to administer themselves'. For Guerboussa, 'Their dispersal is fatal and only through grouping can first a material and then cultural progress be achieved', while for Bethaia it was simply impossible, 'in such a vast territory, without roads and villages, and with such few resources'. In some *douars* the conditions were so abject that, as in the case of the isolated *douar* Beni Chaib, Rohrbacher recommended that the 'status quo' be retained beyond the end of the five-year plan, until at least 1957, by which date the War of Independence had been raging for three years! Rohrbacher recommended that only the relatively well-endowed and flourishing village of Medjadja could be immediately promoted to the status of a rural *commune*.

For Rohrbacher placing the brakes on reform and peasant access to the rural *commune* was given great urgency because of the timing and context of the PACs exercise that took place against the background of a surge in nationalism and a deepening political crisis. The administrator was deeply worried by the insurrection in the Sétif region in May 1945 and detected signs of political unrest spreading into the Ouarsenis and Sersou regions. This was confirmed for him by the election of 2 June 1946 during which the nationalists of Ferhat Abbas and

the *Amie du Manifeste* had registered an unexpected landslide victory throughout the *commune mixte*, including the most isolated *douars* of the Ouarsenis.

In a final report to Lucien Paye and the Governor General, Rohrbacher presented a long philosophic testament on the crisis of empire, larded with quotations from Pascal, Montaigne, Lyautey, and Peguy. In this he remarked that the crisis facing the colony would not be resolved by a premature extension of the vote to illiterate and primitive Algerians: indeed, this was a recipe for disaster. 'We French live here among men that a parody of universal suffrage has allowed on 2 June 1946 to tell us to clear off, while elsewhere on 8 May 1945 one of the recurrent massacres of the French demonstrated in a more decisive and brutal manner the kind of bloody reaction so typical of this murderous civilization'.[62] Rohrbacher linked his warnings to the dangers of global communism and the similarities between the current Algerian anti-French struggle and that launched by the Vietnam Quoc-Dan-Dang (VNQDD) party in 1929.

The Paye project had, by early 1948, been to all intents and purposes killed off by powerful *colons* political interests within the ruling Socialist Party (SFIO) who succeeded in removing the Governor that they liked to deride as 'Chataigneau Ben Mohammed'.[63] Chataigneau was replaced on 11 February 1948 by Marcel-Edmond Naegelen, who immediately opened the gates to systematic electoral fraud to ensure that the new Algerian Assembly elected on 4 April would be dominated by the combined power of right-wing European and Algerian deputies.[64]

Underlying Paye's reform was the intention to sweep away the *communes mixtes* and *caids*, and to replace them by the new rural municipalities, and this was, in principle, embedded in Article 50 and 53 of the Organic Law of 20 September 1947 that promised to abolish this system. However, the second Constituent Assembly artfully hedged this proposal, as it did with the extension of the vote to Algerian women, by making its implementation dependent on the future Algerian Assembly, which duly left it to gather dust.[65] The government, determined to halt the considerable advances made by the nationalists in the countryside during 1946–7, set about crushing the anti-colonial *djemâas* through arbitrary arrests, intimidation and administrative closure (see Chapter 9). However, the Organic Law by proposing to abolish the CM had confirmed that the entire system of indirect rule was not fit for purpose, energized the anti-colonial militants, and undermined the self-confidence and morale of the *caids*.[66]

[62] AOM 1Y113, *etablissement d'un plan d'action communale*, 12 August 1946.

[63] G. Pervillé, *La France*, 402–4, on this campaign led by senior politicians including René Mayer, Jules Moch, and Georges Bidault.

[64] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 220–2.

[65] M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.770–3, 794–6.

[66] AOM 4i197, Zannettaci, *Monographie politique*, CM Cherchell claimed the Law of 1947 by proposing suppression of the CMs, 'had come to constitute the key element in the propaganda of the extremist parties'.

During August 1948 Marcel Angeletti, a journalist on the communist daily *Alger Républicain*, visited a number of newly created municipal centres across the three departments, and reported how the reform had been strangled at birth. The immense optimism of the peasantry that they could cast off the 'semi-feudal' regime of the *communes mixtes* and at last manage their own local affairs was dashed by a refusal to provide the necessary budget.[67] Djemad Chérif, deputy for Constantine, described how the peasants in various centres had, in the absence of state funding, heroically seized the initiative to carry out considerable projects using their own labour and resources, including repairing bridges, building and equipping schools, constructing water supplies and drains, installing a dynamo for electricity, and even buying a lorry to assure food supplies.[68] But effectively the government led by Naegelen had strangled the reform, 'because it was frightened by any popular initiative', and the *caidat* was once again firmly installed in its rule over a 'period of slavery'.

There is considerable evidence on the extent to which the French and Algiers governments aborted the Paye initiative by refusing to provide even a modest level of state finance for rural development.[69] The extent of the failure was revealed by the second five-year plan for Algeria which, published a few months before the November insurrection, showed how agriculture, especially in the 'traditional' peasant sector, remained stagnant in the face of rapid demographic expansion.[70] The social and economic situation of the peasantry, 76 per cent of the total Algerian population, had not improved at all since 1946, and was, if anything, worse since per capita production of essential cereals and livestock was lower than in 1939.[71] In December 1952 Jules Rohrbacher, about to retire after a long career as administrator, praised the Paye reform, but with a tired resignation signed off

[67] Marcel Angeletti wrote six articles on his tour published between 28 August and 4 September 1948; see also a later article by the Kabyle teacher and communist militant Larbi Braik, 'La sabotage des centres municipaux de Kabylie', in *Alger Républicain*, 8 October 1949.

[68] Djemad Chérif, 'Voici pourquoi le gouvernement général cherche à supprimer les centres municipaux', *Liberté*, 10 February 1949. Djemad, deputy from 1946 to 1951 in the National Assembly, campaigned for an investigation of the Sétif massacre.

[69] See the budget data in G. Pervillé, *La France*, 245–6, 250–3, 388–9. On the political brake placed on the *Paysannat* plans between 1948 and 1954, see François Perroux (ed.), *Problèmes de l'Algérie indépendante* (Paris: PUF, 1963); Roger Lequy, 'L'agriculture algérienne de 1954 à 1962', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 8 (1970), 65–6.

[70] ANP 19960480/8, *Deuxième plan de modernisation et d'equipement. Rapport général. Algérie* (June 1954). Robert Montagne was a member of the commission, that also produced a plan for Morocco and Tunisia. The parlous situation of rural Algeria on the eve of the Revolution of 1954 is further confirmed by a detailed survey carried out by the CM administrators, the *Monographie politique*, of which a selection was made available in 'L'Algérie du demi-siècle vue par les autorités locales', roneo-type, 269 pp., reprinted, with an introduction, by Tayeb Chenntouf (ed.), *L'Algérie en 1954* (Algiers: OPU, 2006).

[71] *Deuxième Plan*, 9, 'Le problème économique et social est encore aujourd'hui ce qu'il était déjà en 1948, lors de la mise en application du premier plan d'équipement'.

on his impossible task to carry out change in the Chelif without the necessary finances: 'It is our habit to leave such distant promises to a vague future and to address to a sterile past a farewell smile.'[72]

The arrival of Naegelen in February 1948 marked a crucial watershed, the point at which the late colonial state cynically abandoned the basic rules of electoral democracy, and any attempt to provide a solution to the economic and political crisis in the *douars*, the zones in which the huge mass of desperate peasants had been penned, was aborted. The following seven years witnessed a period of 'immobilism', a blocked system in which the *communes mixtes* were given an extended lease of life. The CM administrators of the Chelif, during this period, constantly regaled their superiors with tired, formulaic reassurances of rural calm and solid security. However, the government crushing of any electoral road to autonomy or independence in 1948, immediately precipitated in the MTLD and PCA a move towards the clandestine preparation of armed insurrection. The irony was that eight years later, in June 1956, the Minister Lacoste sought a solution to the ongoing conflict by inviting Lucien Paye to return to Algiers to revive his plan for municipal reform.

The turbulent five-year period between late 1943 and February 1948 was one during which all the contending forces that were to eventually erupt in the revolution of November 1954 were gathering strength. Part 2 turns next to the question of how the peasants of the Ouarsenis and Dahra succeeded after 1943 in developing an anti-colonial resistance that, a decade later, mutated into a fully fledged guerrilla army.

[72] AOM Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique* [6/053].

PART II

PEASANT POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND CONTESTATION, *C.*1932–54

6
Fraction Resistance as Everyday Politics

Part 2 of this book moves on to the question of how the peasants of the Ouarsenis and Dahra, from the end of the First World War through to 1954, organized resistance to the colonial state, and in particular the CM system. While the ideologies of socialism and nationalism, generated among migrants workers in the mines and factories of metropolitan France, first took root in the urban centres of northern Algeria, the militants and propagandists who made early contact with the rural population found, often to their surprise, that the peasants already possessed sophisticated forms of social and political organization that they were compelled to take note of or adapt to their purpose. This chapter looks first at the role of the fraction, the small community of about four to six hundred people, which constituted the basic unit of Maghrebian society that regulated its affairs through an autonomous assembly (*djemâa*).[1]

We later examine an entirely different *djemâa*, created by *sénatus* laws of 1863, that operated at the level of the *douar* that had a population of about two thousand to nine thousand inhabitants. But the key to an understanding of the inner dynamics of Algerian peasant society lies with the fraction (*ferqa*), an assembly made up of the adult males of the joint families (*ayla*) that regulated the internal affairs of the small, face-to-face community.[2] Historians, over-preoccupied with the fate of the 'tribe' and its supposed terminal dislocation by the 1863 *sénatus-consulte*, have often failed to note that rural society retained a high degree of cohesion and continuity at a deeper, sub-tribal level of organization.[3] Robert Montagne recognized this clearly. The fraction (for which he used the term 'canton') was this 'minuscule territory, that truly reflected the cells that go to make up all Berber states . . . this is the most vibrant,

[1] The fraction *djemâa* can be best understood as a simple type of all-male meeting or committee that could assume numerous forms from one region to another, or even adapt itself to gatherings of migrant workers in France. However, what distinguished it from any ad hoc assembly is the way in which it was governed by certain traditions of collective decision-making, consensus, and group solidarity: see F. Colonna, *Savants paysans*, 97, on the existence of several forms of *djemâa*, depending on its function.

[2] In the Chelif region this was called a *bocca*. I have tried to avoid use of the term 'village' in relation to the fraction since this usually carries the misleading connotations of nucleated settlements. A map in J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 104, shows how the *bocca* can be best understood as a dispersed hamlet, but one in which farmhouses were still close enough to enable the inhabitants to walk to shared events in the mosque, the cemetery, Koranic school, and *djemâa*. When the FLN later held clandestine night-time meetings of the inhabitants they mobilized them within this active community frame.

[3] I have explored this issue in 'The Roots of Insurrection: The Role of the Algerian Village Assembly (*Djemâa*) in Peasant Resistance, 1863–1962', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52.2 (2013), 419–47.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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the most active and often the most stable organism that the people of North Africa are capable of creating.... Tribes and confederations may break up and disappear, but the elements from which they are composed continue to exist.'[4] During the long phase of colonial domination and destruction of Algerian rural society, especially through the appropriation of huge areas of land and forest, the fraction provided the resilient cell that made a deeper level of political continuity possible, and enabled peasant societies to adopt survival strategies to cope with the violent dislocation (*déracinement*) of occupation.

The fraction, which had a population of a few hundred individuals, was an amalgam of a few dozen joint family households that were bound by ties of consanguinity. Quite typical was the situation in the *douar* of Beni Hindel in the Ouarsenis where in 1946 five thousand inhabitants, who lived in isolated farmhouses scattered over 10,000 hectares, were sub-divided into twelve fractions.[5] One of the twelve fractions of the *douar*, Metidja, studied by the ethnologist Jacques Lizot, had a population of 630 in 1954. This community was defined by consanguinity (shared descent from a real or mythical ancestor), daily contact in fields and mosque, reciprocal exchanges of group labour (*twiza*), endogamous marriage alliances, sharing of communal lands and forests, and a complex of religious festivals and ceremonials (weddings, funerals, feasts) that were marked by rituals of animal sacrifice, sharing meat, and other symbolic acts.[6] This self-governing body, along with the patriarchal family, formed the bedrock of the small, face-to-face peasant society, which nineteenth-century ethnologists like Masqueray compared to the ancient democratic Greek *cité*.[7]

The fraction-*djemâa* was usually composed of adult men, the heads of the *ayla*, who met weekly after the Friday mosque service or on the market day, either in open-air meeting spaces provided with stone benches or in the mosque itself. During assembly discussions the lead was taken by male elders, respected in the community for their wisdom, experience, skill, and moral integrity. From such notables the assembly chose a leader (*kebir*) to supervise the day-to-day running of village affairs. Decisions were reached not by a formal, majority vote, but through consensus. The *djemâa* made decisions relating to almost every aspect of village life, such as the settlement of disputes, the building and repair of communal property (Koranic schools, the mosque, roads, public fountains, and

[4] Robert Montagne, *Les Berbères et Le Makhzen dans le Sud du Maroc. Essai sur la transformation politique des Berbères sédentaires (groupe chleuh)* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930), 180; see also Rémy Leveau, *Le fellah marocain, defendeur du trône* (Paris: Presses FNSP, 1976), 32–6, on the fraction as the key socio-political unit of rural society in late colonial Morocco.

[5] J. Lizot, *Metidja*. The *douar* of Beni Hindel, with a population of 5,574 Algerians in 1946, was one of the twenty-six *douars* that made up the *commune mixte* of Chelif that was subdivided into 291 *boccas*: see Table 1, p. 58.

[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, rev. edn), 2–19.

[7] Emile Masqueray, *Formation des cités chez les populations sédentaires de l'Algérie (Kabyles du Djurdjura, Chaouia de l'Aurès, Beni Mzâb)* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1886) [also edited by Fanny Colonna (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1983)].

so forth), equitable distribution of communal land rights between families, collective labour (*corvées*), allocation and collection of taxes, the organization of annual feasts, and they made sure visiting strangers received proper hospitality (and close surveillance).[8]

In the fraction of Metidja the *djemâa*, observed directly by the anthropologist Jacques Lizot during 1963–4, met periodically in the mosque and, as was often the case elsewhere, appears to have kept no written minutes or records, no fixed schedule, and met as issues arose. The assembly regulated many issues affecting the internal affairs of the community that would normally be regarded as the legal and administrative prerogative of the state, including the regulation of inheritance, conflict and dispute resolution, and water and irrigation rights.[9]

It would be a mistake to picture the enduring *djemâa* through a romantic, Rousseauist image of idealized peasant communalism in which individualism played no part. Peasants had always sought to maximize individual or family advantage and the history of Algeria is replete with the bitter and often bloody disputes or vendettas between neighbours over land, water rights, and honour that were universal to rural societies. In a classic Mediterranean society of honour, it was essential to prevent feuds from deteriorating into bloody vendettas that could disrupt and decimate communities. Unity of purpose also became essential when the small community was presented with an external threat from another fraction, tribal invader, or colonial occupier.[10] At such moments it was the customary response of Maghrebian society to override internal squabbles that weakened the ability to organize a cohesive defence.

Mountain peasants preferred, as far as possible, to regulate their own affairs, since this fended off the intrusion of agents of the state, officials who were always suspected of gathering intelligence on land, livestock, crops, and human capital. The colonial historian Georges-Henri Bousquet described the extraordinary cohesion and force of the village *omerta* code: 'Little children at five years are already indoctrinated, and just like the adults maintain secrecy when external authorities come, for example, to investigate a crime.'[11]

The existence of the Algerian fraction-*djemâa* should come as no surprise, since the existence of such regulatory assemblies at the local level, often below or outside the organizational structures of the modern state, has been an almost universal

[8] See P. Lapalud, *Douar Aghbal*, 47, 108–9, 119, on the role of the *djemâa* in the Dahra mountains during the 1930s that adjudicated on land disputes and property rights.

[9] J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 54–5, 99–100, 106–7.

[10] M. Bennoune, *El Akbia, un siècle d'histoire algérienne, 1857–1975* (Algiers: OPU, 1975), 52, remarks: 'It was necessary [for the *djemâa*] to contain such conflicts and disputes in order to avoid exposing the social cohesion and political unity of such collectivities to the threat of permanent tension and rupture.'

[11] Jean Morizot, *Algérie Kabylisée* (Paris: J. Peyronnet, 1962), 119. See also Stora, *Le nationalisme*, 146–9, on such forms of resistance; and Guignard, *Abus de pouvoir*, 101–2, on 'collective silence'.

feature of peasant societies.[12] As we will see, for anti-colonial movements and guerrilla forces, seeking to penetrate the mountains to make first contact with the peasantry, the fraction consisting of a few hundred inhabitants, constituted the fundamental cell of rural society with which they could enter into a dialogue.

An insight into how the fraction-*djemâa* coalesced with external anti-colonial movements is provided by the Kabyle activist Mouloud Mammeri and the communist militant Jacqueline Guerroudj. In a discussion with Pierre Bourdieu, Mammeri, an influential champion of Berber language, poetry, and anthropology, explained how his father was one of the last professional bards or sages (*amusnaw*) who undertook a long apprenticeship in oratorical skills and the practical wisdom or science of Kabyle society (*tamusni*).[13] The sage dispensed his wisdom in the *djemâa*, and in other places of sociability such as artisan workshops, market places, or pilgrimages, and was highly respected for his expertise in practical matters such as medical remedies, demarcation of boundary disputes, and when to sow crops. He was also called upon to adjudicate difficult matters facing the community, and was delegated the authority to negotiate on its behalf with external powers. Mammeri concludes by saying that the *amusnaw* 'was truly a political role', and Bourdieu sums up: 'He is the man of situations of crisis, crucial situations, the one who is capable of speaking and saying what is to be said when everyone is reduced to silence.'[14]

Mammeri remarks that boys and youths sitting in on the various social gatherings of men learned the arts of debate and measured and wise decision-making:

> [T]here was that informal apprenticeship. The village assembly had an important role in this, which met at regular intervals—for example, every other Thursday—to resolve all the past and forthcoming business of the village. These assemblies were veritable schools of *tamusni* since those who took part in them were naturally the most eloquent people, the masters of language. But anyone could attend, even children. I personally attended a great number of village assemblies from childhood onwards and I remember very clearly how they proceeded.[15]

[12] See Jerome Blum, 'The Internal Structure and Polity of the European Village Community from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Modern History* 43.4 (1971), 541–76; on the Russian *mir*, a communal form of village organization that was self-regulating and autonomous, see E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 58–69; and Orlando Figes, 'The Russian Peasant Community in the Agrarian Revolution, 1917–18', ch. 14 in Roger Bartlett (ed.), *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia: Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 237–53.

[13] Pierre Bourdieu and Mouloud Mammeri, 'Dialogue on Oral Poetry', *Ethnography* 5.4 (2004), 511–51; on Mammeri, see Malika Kebbas (ed.), *Mammeri, 1917–1989. L'intellectuelle démocrate impénitent* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2008).

[14] P. Bourdieu and M. Mammeri, 'Dialogue', 543.

[15] P. Bourdieu and M. Mammeri, 'Dialogue', 518. For a similar account of such an apprenticeship, see Omar Boudaoud, later head of the central *Comité fédéral* of the FLN in France, on his attendance as a 14- or 15-year-old in the village *djemâa* in which a studied economy of words, rather than verbosity, was a sign of virtue and therefore to be encouraged: *Du PPA au FLN. Mémoires d'un combattant* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2007), 14–15.

It is important to note, in relation to my overall thesis, that the fraction-*djemâa* did not constitute a simple transmission belt of an unchanging oral tradition, a memory of long-past revolts. Rather, it was a highly flexible and dynamic organization that constantly adapted custom and knowledge to resolve problems and crises as they arose, and this helps to explain the long-term durability of the village *djemâa*. As militant nationalist and communist movements penetrated the more isolated interior after 1945, we find evidence of modern political cells that, far from displacing the *djemâa*, emerged effortlessly from the deep cultural values and practices of the peasant assembly. Valuable evidence of this has been recorded by the communist militants, Jacqueline and Abdelkader Guerroudj, both school teachers, as they sought to organize political cells among impoverished peasants in the hinterland of Tlemçen in 1948.

Jacqueline Guerroudj was astonished, on first contact, to find that isolated and largely illiterate mountain peasants already possessed a highly structured communist organization, a fact which she found difficult to understand or explain. She made a detailed record of the proceedings of the first communist meeting that she attended at Ouchba, and though she does not use the term '*djemâa*', it carried the indelible imprint of the culture and practices of the traditional assembly. Twenty or thirty men gathered at night by the light of candles and paraffin lamps, and the three leaders, Tahar Ghomri, Medjoub Berrahou, and Kaddour Mohamedi, began by outlining the issues and problems that were to be debated. The meeting was conducted in the measured verbal economy of peasant culture, and the men sat in silence for fifteen minutes while each reflected, then:

> Each man spoke in turn and discussion was engaged in a calm ordered way, ending in operational decisions that concerned first their reply to pressing problems, immediate issues of survival: how to counter the measles epidemic, assist in the construction of a house, ensure the defense of those [militants] who had been arrested, to support their families who had been left totally without resources, etc.[16]

Subsequent meetings analysed the source of each problem, such as the colonial administration, and its structure and agents, and agreed on effective forms of action:

> Letters, petitions, and delegates to present them to the authorities, information to be sent to the press, preparation for elections. . . . To summarize, their approach started from every-day life, the immediate struggle for survival and the possible improvement of their living conditions, the methods of reaching this goal, and ended up with the analysis of the causes of their oppression, the economic and

[16] On the similar procedure and disapproval of unnecessary verbosity in the traditional Russian commune (*mir*), see E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 60–1.

social structures determining their condition, and the principles which they could apply in their defense.[17]

The leader Tahar Ghomri, not unlike the Kabyle *amusnaw* described by Mammeri, was a man respected for his wisdom. He possessed a deep indigenous culture, could read and write Arabic, and had been active in the reformist *Ulema* before transferring to the PCA in 1946, where he helped organize trade union and strike activity among agricultural workers and peasants.[18]

The ancient institution of the *djemâa* at the level of the small community of the fraction leant itself to forms of collective decision-making that could readily evolve or transmute into modern forms of party politics. But to understand how this happened we have to understand how this came about through amalgamation into a much larger body, the *douar-djemâa*, which was formally instituted by the colonial state.

The *douar-djemâa*

The creation of the new *douar-djemâas* in 1863 was linked to the main purpose of the *sénatus* law which brought about a virtual revolution by imposing a French concept of property rights that transformed land into a market commodity. Between 1864 and 1870 teams of commissioners, assisted by surveyors, were able to delimit the *douars* and to adjudicate on precise land holdings.[19] The *sénatus* 'frenchification' of land rights has been presented by historians as a one-sided process in which an all-powerful colonial regime swept away the rights and defence-works of a decimated tribal society. However, this is to overlook the fact that the *sénatus* did recognize certain rights of consultation and legal objection by the *douar-djemâa*, especially in relation to communal property. The administrators knew from experience that it was hardly possible to demarcate or adjudicate the extraordinary complexity of landownership, of terrain that seemed to have no clear boundary markers and shifting or nomadic use rights, without consultation with peasants, many of whom also held title deeds dating from the Ottoman era. Such legal rights under the *sénatus*, no matter how weak, provided the peasantry with one of the few methods of resistance left open to it after the crushing of the great Mokrani revolt in 1871.[20]

[17] Jacqueline Guerroudj, *Des douars et des prisons* (Algiers: Bouchène, 1993), 19–20; author interview with Abdelkader Guerroudj, Algiers, 28 and 31 January 2012; see also the interview with Halima Ghomri, daughter of Tahar Ghomri, in Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, *Des femmes dans la Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Karthala, 1994), 100–3.

[18] R. Gallissot (ed.), *Dictionnaire*, 307.

[19] D. Guignard, 'Conservatoire ou révolutionnaire?', 81–96.

[20] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Royaume arabe*, 363.

Until the path-breaking work of E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters* (1975), historians, mainly located within a Marxist tradition, interpreted the law and the legal system as an instrument of class rule, and ignored or denied the ability of subaltern groups to deploy law as a counter-weapon of resistance.[21] In recent years social historians have explored the way in which subaltern groups, from women to servants and ethnic minorities, have deployed the law as a weapon of the weak. The suggestion that Thompson's thesis might be fruitfully applied to colonial Algeria may come as a surprise to historians who have depicted settler occupation as one of unremitting violence backed up by a racial and class legal system, a 'legal "monster"'.[22] After 1871 Algerian peasants, faced with the inexorable juggernaut of colonialism, market capitalism, and a powerful army, and without the means for armed revolt, had recourse to legal and administrative appeal. The historian Jean-Paul Charnay noted that peasants, 'once the voice of the gun fell silent, were left with only one choice: to penetrate into the maze of texts and the cogs of the administration in order to defend their lands', and did so through the *douar-djemâa*.[23] The tendency for peasants 'to go to law' is of considerable interest since it provides evidence of the long-term political apprenticeship of the *douar-djemâa* and the development of a culture of opposition that was later to merge into the nationalist struggle.

While in some instances the presidents of *djemâas* used their position to prey, as did *caids*, on the local peasantry to amass personal or clan wealth, there are many instances in which the assembly was an instrument for the defence of traditional communal rights. For example, in 1868 the *douar* Ouled Defelten was able to contest the state's claim to property and succeeded in asserting its rights to 36 hectares of communal forest.[24] The administrator of the CM of Mékerra in Oranie, Jean Fendeler, studied the *djemâa* minute books (*méchaouaras*) for the years 1885 to 1919.[25] Fendeler noted: 'These deliberations, sometimes naive, often marked by a high level of reasoning, also reveal a certain independent spirit—one finds objections, resistance, reservations, and sometimes

[21] E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), especially the coda to his study, 'The Rule of Law', 258–69: 'For as long as it remained possible, the ruled—if they could find a purse and a lawyer—would actually fight for their rights by means of a law.' On the debate surrounding the thesis, see Daniel H. Cole, '"An Unqualified Human Good": E. P. Thompson and the Rule of Law', *Journal of Law and Society* 28.2 (2001), 177–203.

[22] See Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *De l'indigénat: anatomie d'un «monstre» juridique: le droit colonial en Algérie et dans l'empire français* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010); E. P. Thompson, *Whigs*, 258–9, suggested that how the 'rule of law' expanded globally with European imperialism was worthy of attention.

[23] Jean-Paul Charnay, *La vie musulmane en Algérie d'après la jurisprudence de la première moitié du XXe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1991), 229–31.

[24] *Bulletin officiel du gouvernement général de l'Algérie* (1868), 1126–7; D. Sari, *Le désastre démographique*, 295–6.

[25] Jean Fendeler, '"Les djemaas de douars" dans les communes mixtes de la Mékerra et du Telagh (Département d'Oran) et d'Ain-Touta (Département de Constantine)', CHEAM (1938), 40 pp., *Centre des archives contemporaines*, Fontainebleau, 20000046, art. 4. no. 110.

outright opposition.' He illustrated this by reference to the *djemâa* of the *douar* Tifillés that during 1886–7 successfully negotiated with the government a higher price for a concession of communal lands for the creation of a new centre at Hassi Zehana. The government conceded that spring water that was to be supplied to the future *colons* settlement should also be piped to the village of Tifillés and to two new cattle troughs at a rate of a litre per second; that permission be given to clear the remaining communal lands so that landless families could be granted eight hectares each; and that the new centre be located on the periphery so as not to impede cattle movement and grazing.

Douar leaders, especially in the piedmont zones, were able to acquire, both through their own personal involvement in the land market and proximity to urban centres, a solid, pragmatic knowledge of the complex and ever-shifting body of property law and were a match for *colons* bent on expanding into the *douars*. In some instances a *douar* was able to sustain a dogged 'legal' resistance over decades, as in the celebrated case of the Beni Urjin, who fought for their commons in a monumental struggle that lasted from 1889 to 1913.[26] Even in a situation in which the *douar* notables were illiterate and poor, the *djemâa* succeeded in going to court in 1898 and, on appeal to the *Conseil d'État*, won their action against both the municipality of Morris and the prefect. After the 'insurrection' of Margueritte in 1901, the authorities were terrified by the threat of peasant revolt and, concerned that the Beni Urjin court victory was encouraging other *djemâas* in Kabylie to follow its example, procured a 1903 ruling of the appeal court (*cour de cassation*) that reversed the decision and found in favour of the Morris *colons*. The peasants had lost the legal battle after five long, costly years, but the authorities continued to face strong resistance when they tried to implement the court decision during 1908 to 1913, and a body of officials, gendarmes, and field guards were forced to retreat when met by some two hundred men, women, and children armed with sticks and forks.

Although the Beni Urjin faced insuperable odds, especially in a situation in which the state felt that it could not afford to be seen to lose in such a high-profile case, the conflict is revealing of the potential for an oppositional *djemâa* politics. The *douars* had a level of internal organization that enabled them to unite in the defence of the community interest and to raise a legal fund, and they were inspired by a burning sense of injustice that sustained them, often through years of struggle, to seek redress in the courts.[27]

[26] Didier Guignard, 'L'affaire Beni Urjin: un cas de résistance à la mainmise foncière en Algérie coloniale', *Insaniyat* 25–6 (2004), 101–22.

[27] Didier Guignard, *L'affaire Beni Urjin*, 121, remarks that colonial land dispossession was achieved primarily through the machinery of law, as was the case for the forest enclosures studied by E. P. Thompson, a domination that rested on French control of the written text. But the Beni Urjin, operating 'in a foreign language and code, effected a breach in the closely guarded terrain of the written text'.

This pattern of peasant opposition can be found in the Chelif region where, as in the case of Margueritte, the epicentre of resistance lay in the piedmont, the point of transition from plain to mountain that came under intense *colons* pressure between *c.*1870 and 1914, both through the creation or expansion of urban centres and 'private' colonization that rested mainly on *licitations*.

Likewise in the western Chelif valley near Zemmora similar tensions built up after 1880 over plans to create five new centres. Here a *colons* in 1882 laid claim to 4,500 hectares of rich soil that he had acquired through a dubious transaction with one Boubekeur ould Lakeul. In the face of every form of threat to the Beni Dergoun, including bringing in the army and displacing the entire population into 900 hectares of steep, rocky forest, the *douar*, with the support of the administrator Alexandre Bouchot, sustained a long legal battle from 1900 to 1923. The peasants seem, through dogged resistance on the ground and in the courts, to have finally won the day and the dossier was closed after forty years of conflict.[28]

That the peasantry was able to sustain such long campaigns through legal action and petitions, and to entertain some hope of success, was in part due to the fact that lawyers and officials were motivated by a professional ethic of legal equity and administrative order, and a perceived need to uphold French values in the face of spoliation. Here, as in eighteenth- century England, the rule of law was associated with 'civilization', and acted as a restraint, no matter how imperfect, on arbitrary power. The Algerian senator Paul Gérente in 1894 denounced the Warnier Law, under the cover of which certain unscrupulous agents, 'unfaithful even to the spirit of the law, the spirit of justice', built fortunes at the expense of the ignorant poor, 'dishonoured the French administration', and turned French law into 'an amazing and monstrous instrument of spoliation'.[29]

For peasants to hire lawyers was both difficult and costly and a far more common procedure was that of the petition, a much cheaper option that even an individual peasant could employ, with the assistance of the public scribes that offered their services in the market place. Social historians are showing a growing interest in the language of the poor in letters and petitions that reveal their mental universe.[30] John Chalcraft has shown how Egyptian peasants during the 1860s and 1870s, which were organized like the Algerian fraction in village communities

[28] C. Phéline, 'Deux cas', 217, comments: 'Peasant resistance also knew how to exploit all the resources of the judicial institutions and their current contradictions.' Some administrators like Camille Sabatier backed the *djemâa* against the abuses of rapacious forest guards and *caids*; see A. Mahé, *Grande Kabylie*, 245–52.

[29] Senate debate, 16 February 1894, quoted in J. Sessions, 'Débattre', 70. On the similar concern of British administrators in Africa to uphold natural justice and legality against 'repugnant' judicial practices, see Sally Folk Moore, 'Treating Law as Knowledge: Telling Colonial Officers What to Say to Africans about Running "Their Own" Native Courts', *Law and Society Review* 26.1 (1992), 11–46.

[30] Simona Cerruti, 'Who Is Below? E. P. Thompson, historien des sociétés modernes: une relecture', *Annales HSS* 4 (2015), 948–50; Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c.1860–1920* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013).

under headmen, far from being the passive or silent creatures so frequently described by Marxists, were able to denounce exploitation by powerful landlords by an appeal to the standards of justice of their 'Glorious rulers'.[31] Ageron was impressed by the volume of appeals or petitions found in the archives that were written in Arabic to various ministers or the President of the Republic between 1895 and 1900 that spelled out the terrible impact of their exclusion from grazing and wood-cutting rights.[32] Such petitions were widespread in the Chelif region. For example, in Margueritte, a month before the 1901 revolt, fourteen peasants addressed a petition to the French President to 'solicit you to willingly return our lands where we live with our wretched families'.[33] Djilali Sari found similar evidence of letters and petitions for the Ouarsenis in the archives of the *Eaux et Forêts*, from Ouled Ghalia (1892, 1900), Beni Hindel (1882, 1889), Béni Boukhanous (1900 to 1911), and elsewhere, many of them couched in the standard format of the humble supplicant. Annick Lacroix has shown how the spread of a postal and telephone service into isolated rural areas during the inter-war period created a situation in which peasants increasingly saved time and costs by communicating with the colonial administration to resolve bureaucratic or litigious issues, or to submit petitions.[34]

It would be a mistake to assume that such petitions were largely ignored or simply filed away to collect dust, especially when the claimed abuse was particularly unsavoury, or threatened to bring the administration into disrepute or to trigger political exposure in parliament or the press, and the archives contain thick dossiers that show concern at the highest levels of the colonial government.[35] However, it seems likely that the standard rhetoric of the appeal, often couched in the language of the humble servant, could also serve a conservative function and fit readily with the patrimonial culture and hierarchical relations of rural society, not unlike the European tradition of supplicants to the 'good king'. The widespread use of the petition may have also served to channel the hostility and frustration of the peasantry away from revolt and, at least for a while, served to reinforce the stability of the colonial order.[36] Algerian rural society, with the exception of a few minor revolts like that of Margueritte, remained exceptionally quiescent between 1871 and 1945 in the face of endemic poverty and a harsh, repressive colonial regime. Many Europeans were so shocked by the quotidian

[31] John Chalcraft, 'Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37.3 (2005), 303–25.

[32] C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens*, 1.491–2; H.-L. Clark, 'Doctoring the *Bled*', 34–5, 203–4.

[33] C. Phéline, 'Deux cas locaux', 216. Isabelle Grangaud, notes Phéline, argues that such petitions could have a long history dating back to the Ottomans.

[34] Annick Lacroix, 'La poste au douar. Usagers non citoyens et État colonial dans les campagnes algériennes de la fin du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre mondiale', *Annales H.S.S.* 71.3 (2016), 711–39.

[35] I return to the question of the petition later, in particular in relation to peasant mobilization by the communist and Messalist movements.

[36] A. Lacroix, 'La poste', 730.

violence of the colonial regime, the scale of the cynical land grab, and the desperate poverty of the peasants, that they predicted or expected an uprising that, in fact, rarely materialized.[37]

Jonnart and the 'Electoral Revolution' of 1919

After the end of the First World War the French government sought to reward the Algerian people, who had remained loyal during the conflict and made an enormous sacrifice in men and materials, by several measures, among them the so-called 'Jonnart Law' of 4 February 1919. This act greatly extended the highly restricted Algerian franchise to 425,138 men, or some 43 per cent of adult males, a measure that Ageron described as a 'veritable electoral revolution'.[38] The highly restricted right of 10 per cent of adult Algerian males to vote in elections to municipal and regional councils, or to the *Délégations financières*, remained unchanged, but the unprecedented extension of the *djemâa* electorate was viewed with equanimity since it seemed to present no threat to European dominance of the political system. In the long term this proved to be a miscalculation since it galvanized peasant activism at the grassroots and by the 1930s was providing a channel through which anti-colonial politics was able to spread from the national, urban arena into rural communities.

A number of things came into play here. Firstly, as Christine Guionnet and others have argued, historically the practice of French electoral politics, from the processes of going to a voting station, to filling in a ballot paper, was a practice that had to be learned over many decades, 'an apprenticeship in politics'.[39] Many Algerian peasants in 1919 were less interested in national party politics and central power struggles that appeared to have little relevance to their own lives, than in local battles between rival factions or *çofs* that might have very real implications for clientele networks, access to land and loans, employment, and distribution of welfare. To that extent, *djemâa* elections were of intense interest to the peasantry

[37] A comparative study of other peasant societies undergoing similar land dispossession and impoverishment to that of Algeria suggests many instances in which violent revolt was far more endemic: see, for example, in relation to colonial Mexico, E. R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, ch. 1; Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). Jean Nicolas, *La rébellion française 1661–1789* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), records 8,500 violent disturbances for ancient regime France, about sixty-six incidents per year.

[38] C.-R. Ageron, *Algérie contemporaine*, 2.279; and 'Une politique algérienne libérale sous la Troisième République (1912–1919)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1959), 121–51.

[39] Christine Guionnet, 'Élections et apprentissage de la politique. Les élections municipales sous la monarchie de Juillet', *Revue française de science politique* 46.4 (1996), 555–79; *L'apprentissage de la politique moderne. Les élections municipales sous la monarchie de Juillet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997); 'La politique au village: une révolution silencieuse', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 45.4 (1998), 775–88.

and the inter-war *douar* elections of 1919, 1925, 1929, 1935, and later caused political ferment in rural Algeria.

Before 1919 the members of the *djemâa* had been chosen by the military commander or sub-prefect, usually to represent each of the fractions in the *douar*, but now the representatives were elected on the basis of political party lists. The peasantry now controlled local assemblies that, no matter how restricted their powers, provided one of the very few institutional bases through which they could express opposition to the colonial system and, to some degree, ensure the protection of land rights, the more equitable distribution of social welfare, and access to communal employment.[40] The *douar-djemâa* thus passed from an early stage of legalistic defence of communal rights into a potentially far more explosive political phase of electoral militancy.

The senior CM administrator Jean Fendeler, who closely observed the *douar-djemâa* throughout the period from 1919 to 1936, provides a valuable insight, even if from a conservative administrative position, into the changes taking place. He noted that elections were hotly contested not only as a matter of individual prestige and honour, but also because of the considerable economic rewards that were at stake. The 1919 law, while placing a bar on *caids* or field guards standing in the elections, transferred to the *djemâas* a bigger share in the administration of the *Société indigènes de prévoyance* (SIP), which controlled the distribution or allocation of loans of money and seed-grain to peasants facing crop failure, usury, and starvation.[41]

Fendeler claimed that in Mékerra, a rich zone of the Oran region in which wealthy wine makers had appropriated up to 90 per cent of the land, the communal and SIP distributions were crucial resources for the poor and helped to alleviate the tensions that could fuel violent unrest. The paternalistic administrator claimed that before the First World War, assisted by pliable *djemâas*, he had been able to ensure relative equity, but that this had been rapidly undermined by the 'quite brutal' impacts of the 1919 law. Newly enfranchised but illiterate and gullible peasants, with no experience or understanding of a democratic electoral system, were, he claimed, easily misled by groups of wealthy notables who resuscitated the moribund clan system (*çofs*) to pack the *djemâas* with their own clientele and to hand out SIP loans or rent communal land to their supporters.

Yet the elected *djemâas*, far from confirming existing power relations, contributed to the undermining of colonial authority. The 1919 law suppressed the notorious native code for all new electors (43 per cent of adult males), and this started the process of weakening the disciplinary powers of the CM administrator

[40] Daho Djerbal, 'Les auxiliaires de l'administration française dans l'Est algérien des années trente et quarante. Intégration et dissidence', *Bulletin IHTP* 84 (2007), 89–96.

[41] On the SIP, see C.-R. Ageron, *Algériens musulmans*, 2.861–71.

and *caids* that was confirmed by decree in 1928.[42] The law also excluded as candidates in the *djemâa* elections the *caids*, *bachagas*, *aghas*, field guards, *khodjas*, and other police agents that constituted the key force through which administrators exercised rule over the huge, dispersed populations of the interior. Such exclusions enabled the *djemâas* to present themselves as an alternative pole of mobilization against the detested *caids*, many of whom had long track records of corruption and violence. The elected *djemâas* regarded themselves as holding a far more legitimate mandate than the handpicked *caids*, viewed as creatures of the colonial regime, and Fendeler complained bitterly: 'Often they lay claim to the right to administer, to rule over, and to change everything, noisily pretending to annihilate the prestige and authority of the *caid*.'[43]

To Fendeler, the 1919 law seemed to have opened a Pandora's box: peasants, with a new sense of empowerment, began to resurrect ancient quarrels over land rights and forest access once thought dead and buried, resulting in a deeply worrying 'recriminatory movement that will be difficult to calm especially in a region [Oranie] where official and private colonization has had a considerable development'.[44] He considered it especially threatening that the pre-war respect and deference for the CM administrator was dissolving rapidly, as *djemâas* met without his permission, no longer replied to his orders, and displayed 'a combative and violent character', so that he was increasingly compelled to have recourse to arrest warrants and other forms of judicial and police restraint.

In 1931, Fendeler was transferred from Oranie to head the *commune mixte* of Ain Touta in the Constantine region, where over the next five years he witnessed a turbulent phase of emerging nationalism led by the *jeunes algériens* of Dr Mohammed-Salah Bendjelloul and the reformist Islamic association of the *Ulema* founded by Ben Badis.[45] Bendjelloul, head of the Constantine *Fédération des élus*, targeted the *djemâas*, which he recognized as providing a key opportunity and instrument for the radicalization of rural society. For example at El Kantara, on the western fringes of the Aurès mountains in December 1932 the inhabitants of the so-called 'Village Blanc' instigated a campaign to remove a *caid*. Fendeler claimed the village 'had always been a dangerous centre of resistance and opposition'.[46] Several *djemâas* in Fendeler's area (including the *douars* Ouled Aouf, Tilatou, Ouled Chelih, and Tahanent) told inhabitants to stop paying fines imposed by forest guards for illegal grazing, while many other *djemâas* campaigned surreptitiously against payment of taxes, leading to the prosecution of two

[42] From 1928 onwards only the *juges de paix* could adjudicate on minor infractions, although the repressive Native Code was only definitively abolished by the *ordonnance* of 7 March 1944.

[43] J. Fendeler, 'Les djemâas', 16. [44] J. Fendeler, 'Les djemâas', 14.

[45] On the nationalist ferment in this region see the important thesis of Julien Fromage, 'Innovation politique et mobilisation de masse en "situation coloniale": un "printemps algérien" des années 1930? L'expérience de la Fédération des élus musulmans du département de Constantine', doctoral thesis, EHESS, 2012.

[46] J. Fendeler, 'Les djemâas', 26–7.

presidents and five *djemâa* members. After the turbulent elections of 1935, the new pro-Bendjelloul *djemâas* undertook against the administration, the *caids*, and other agents, 'a campaign of denigration, resistance, and systematic opposition'.

Mahfoud Bennoune notes how in El Akbia after 1919 the members of the *djemâa* 'gradually became the authentic representatives of the people and dared not only to defend their vital interests before the [*sénatus*] commission but, also, to denounce the nepotism and arbitrary power of the *caids* and administrators.' During the 1935 *djemâa* elections, Saad Ben Daradja, candidate of the *Fédération des élus musulmans*, won the presidency after leading an anti-tax campaign.[47] The nationalist movement appears to have penetrated earlier into the rural Constantinois than into the Algerois and the Chelif region, but the political mobilization of the *djemâa* in anti-colonial movements was to follow a similar path in the latter after the end of the Second World War.

The growing oppositional role of the *djemâa* met with a strong response from the CM administration and *caids* through the reinforcement of the role of the fraction headmen, a strata of *douar* government that has been largely ignored by historians. While contemporary nationalist discourse portrayed the *caids* as violent, predatory individuals who dominated the peasants through force, the stereotype has obscured the fact that they were often dependent on the cooperation of the fractions. The *caid*, who usually maintained his own bureau with the assistance of a clerk (*khodja*), was required to collect and register for the CM administrator an enormous range of information from the peasant community. Many *caids* were 'absentee' in the sense that they preferred to live with their families close to the townships, or were too elderly or physically unfit to go on regular tours through the vast forests, scrublands, and escarpments of the mountains to administer and police directly the thousands of inhabitants scattered in isolated *gourbis*. This was a task more often delegated to younger and fitter associates, especially the mounted field guards who most struck fear into the heart of the peasants and were a common target of assassination.

In general the *caid* team, far from travelling out to serve the needs of their 'clients' expected them to walk, often for many hours, to the bureau where they queued to register births, marriages, and deaths, record land transactions, or apply for ration cards, travel permits, and gun, café, and taxi licences. However, the most vital cog in the machinery of indirect rule was the fraction headman who had an intimate knowledge of every family within the small community, and there was little that would escape their eye in terms of civil registration of births, a farmer's taxable wealth, military conscription of sons, and possession of gun or café licences.

For the CM administration the ability of the *caid* to collect the annual tax revenues provided the most important measure, a statistical device, to chart how

[47] M. Bennoune, *El Akbia*, 127; see also C.-J. Ageron, *Algérie contemporaine*, 280–1.

effectively he was carrying out his overall functions. This data figured prominently in his personnel file and affected his chances of promotion or demotion. The *caid* in turn was heavily dependent on his headmen in effecting the taxation returns. Under the system of rural taxation on revenue (*cédulaires*) introduced in 1918 the authorities calculated an annual cash payment for each household that was revised each year on the basis of how many hectares of cereals had been sown and the quantity harvested, and a count of all livestock, cattle, goats, sheep, horses, donkeys, and mules.[48] It can be appreciated that the regional tax offices and *caids* were themselves unable to collect such data on the thousands of peasant households scattered throughout the inhospitable mountainous zones, but were dependent on the headmen who knew in the minutest detail the changing fortunes of their neighbours.

Every year after the harvest, in a heavily charged climate of apprehension and fear, the tax collection team composed of the European tax inspector, the *caid* and his guards, and the fraction heads gathered at the bureau to collect the money from the hundreds of peasants that descended on foot from the interior. In his memoirs Ferhat Abbas described the disturbing scene in about 1910 as his father, a *caid*, subjected peasants who were unable to hand over their money to the brutal treatment of exposure in the burning sun without a hat and hands tied behind their back, until their relatives paid the tax.[49]

Some forty years later in about 1949 Bachir Hadjadj observed a similar ritual, although by then the severity of punishment had been reduced by the abolition of the native code. But crucially the fraction head would intercede, as far as possible, with the *caid* on behalf of a peasant from his community who was unable to pay, saying, 'the man was honest, a good family man, who was facing some temporary problems'.[50] The *caid*, dependent on the word of his subordinate, then interceded with the tax collector to defend the man: it was not wise, he hinted, to threaten or imprison a peasant who simply had nothing to give, and risked provoking him and others to take up the gun.[51] In this incident we can detect some signs that *caids*, far from always acting in a brutal, repressive way towards the peasants and their headmen were often prepared to negotiate with the small fraction communities and, on occasions, to act as the protectors of the peasantry against the state. Indeed in some instances it was not in the interest of the *caid* to alienate the

[48] There has been little research on the complex post-1918 rural taxation system, but see C. Collot, *Institutions*, 268–73; and, most useful, Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Les paysans algériens du Constantinois devant la fiscalité françaises et la crise économique', ch. 2 in his *Politiques coloniales au Maghreb* (Paris: PUF, 1972), 231–48.

[49] C. R. Ageron, 'Mon testament politique. Un manuscript inédit de Ferhat Abbas', in C.-R. Ageron (ed.), *Genèse de l'Algérie*, 455.

[50] B. Hadjadj, *Les voleurs de rêves*, 214.

[51] The *caid* also persuaded the European tax collector to leniency on the grounds that 95 per cent of the total tax collection had already been achieved. During the Algerian War, French military intelligence continued to use the statistics of tax collection, the most readily available index of peasant resistance, to map the degree to which *douars* were pro-French or pro-FLN.

thousands of peasants under his charge since they possessed considerable counter-powers of non-cooperation and obstruction and could make his life miserable or untenable.

The archives of the CM of Braz show that the headmen had come to play such a vital function by the 1930s that the administrators and *caids* exercised an increasingly careful screening and policing process in their appointment and removal. This expansion of the security state into this previously unknown micro-level of *douar* management indicates how important was the flow of information from the fraction, and the need to guarantee its veracity during the period when nationalism was spreading fast into the interior.[52] Each fraction head was formally appointed by the CM administrator on the advice of the *caid* after he had been carefully screened and assessed on a standard printed form (*notice signalétique*) that checked the candidate for his military record, his wealth in land and livestock, annual tax payment, character and morality, political and religious links, and influence among the population. In a typical example, on 21 November 1940 Benouared Guelmane, *caid* of the *douar* El Hammam, wrote to the CM administrator proposing three candidates as head of the fraction El Hammam, all of them army veterans. He recommended M'Hamed Haddad, who was duly appointed since he showed the ideal profile for such a post. Haddad, a small farmer of 15 hectares, aged 41 years, married with four children, of good morality, had always paid his taxes, could read and write Arabic, had served as a corporal in the army for three years and gained the Croix de Guerre for his energetic actions in Syria, and had good relations with the religious confraternities.[53]

The *caid*, along with the CM administrator, constantly reviewed the performance of the headmen, and if they proved delinquent, incompetent, or politically dubious, they would be subjected to an official warning or formally removed after a five-day notification. They were dismissed for a wide range of reasons, among them criminal activity, including collusion with train thieves, failure to comply with the *caids*' orders and general dereliction of duty, immoral behaviour, drunkenness and fighting, and showing a bad example that could reflect badly on the French administration.[54] Increasingly through the late 1940s headmen were sacked for engaging in various forms of what were described as 'anti-administrative' activities, of which the most common was the concealment of sons, nephews, and other army conscripts, or upkeep of clandestine cafés. With the clamp-down after the *djemâa* elections of 1947 (see Chapter 9) the *caids* led a

[52] The Braz file is at AOM 91301/46. It seems likely that the headman system was generalized throughout northern Algeria, but this awaits confirmation by research in other CM archives.

[53] AOM 91301/46, *notice signalétique* on Haddad, 26 December 1940.

[54] AOM 91301/46 has a large table *c.*1950 in which the CM administrator carried out a global review of all sixty-two headmen in Braz, with comments against each individual indicating no change (RAS: *rien à signaler*) (twenty-two cases); those to receive a warning (*blame*), and others to be retired or removed.

purge of pro-nationalists, as in the case of M'Hamed Haddad, since 'he had energetically carried out propaganda for the PPA party'.[55]

While headmen sometimes engaged in various acts of covert opposition to the *caid*, colluding in tax avoidance by family and kin or supporting the nationalists, it was far more likely, since they were directly appointed on the recommendation of the *caid*, that they came to form part of the latter's pro-French loyalist patronage network. One long-term consequence of the 1919 Jonnart Law was to act as a slow-burning fuse that eventually ignited a major change in grassroots politics that split the *douars* into two warring factions. On the one side stood the *caid* with his retinue of hand-picked fraction headmen that controlled vital issues of taxation, conscription, and policing, and on the other the president of the *djemâa* who was supported by a quite different list of elected members. Under the 1919 Jonnart Law the *djemâa* candidates were not elected to represent each of the fractions but on a sliding scale according to the population of each *douar*.[56]

Thus an apparently minor technical detail of electoral law carried major long-term political consequences since it opened the door to parties in which each group forming a list to contest a *djemâa* election, whether pro-French 'administrative' parties, or oppositional formations of the communist, Messalist, and UDMA, were free to select their *djemâa* candidates from anywhere within the territory of the *douar*. As we will see later (Chapter 9) when peasant leaders of the PCA or PPA in a *douar* approached militants to sign up for their electoral list, they could recruit them from anywhere within the *douar*, and did so frequently from the particular radical fractions in which they had established an activist base. Under the French electoral system, which remains the same today in rural France, each party would print its own ballot paper listing the candidates, and peasants, on arriving at the voting station, would select one ballot and fold it into a small envelope that was posted into the urn.

The Jonnart system opened the way to the politicization of rural Algeria, advancing most strongly into the Constantinois during the 1930s, and then into the Algerois and the Chelif region with explosive force from the mid-1940s. The more we look through the microscope at local rural politics, the more it breaks up into an extraordinarily complex picture of contending, and constantly mutating forces, of changing combinations or antagonisms within and between families, between neighbours, between *caids* and fraction headmen and the members of the *douar djemâa*. In this mosaic there were instances in which loyalist *caids* and *djemâa* presidents, often united by family links, collaborated in exploiting their

[55] AOM 91301/46, order of CM administer de Braz for removal, 24 April 1948. On 23 July 1948 Abdelkader Benamare was recommended for appointment as headman since he came from a loyal and honourable family, 'this family is relentless against the PPA party'.

[56] *Douars* of under 1,000 voted for six members, those between 1,001 to 2,000 voted for eight, and so on up to a ceiling of twenty members for a population of over 15,000. In the CM of Braz, *djemâas* thus ranged in size from six to sixteen members.

peasant community. Faced with such a joint domination the peasants of the *douar* Main organized a clandestine 'subversive action', their own autonomous commune, to oppose the combined force of *caid*, headmen, and *djemâa* president. Eight agitators, the authorities were informed, had addressed crowds gathered at the holy site of the Marabout Sidi Mohamed to declare a virtual UDI. Everyone, they claimed, should refuse to obey the French authorities and not pay their taxes. The gathering immediately proceeded by straw poll to appoint their own municipality led by their self-appointed mayor, deputy mayor, and Justice of the Peace.[57]

This unusual incident illustrates the extent to which peasants in the Dahra were beginning to organize themselves against the colonial state well before the outbreak of the insurrection of 1954. Despite the complex mosaic of contestation within peasant society that could give rise to a variety of combinations, often inspired by inter-familial rivalry and vendettas, a dominant pattern began to emerge after the *djemâa* elections of 1945 as the *caids* and their headmen, carefully selected and policed by the CM administrators, were opposed by emerging groups of militants that mobilized along party lines, that of the PCA or MTLD, through the *djemâa* elections.

Many from the new rural bourgeoisie or middle peasantry that entered into the anti-colonial opposition, often because they had lost out in the race for promotion into the *caidat* or the gravy train of state funding, began to present themselves for election to the presidency of the *douar-djemâa*, a position from which they could enter into a battle for political or clan power at the local level (Chapter 3). An increasing number of peasant leaders in the *douars* deployed the *djemâa* as an instrument of anti-colonial politics while simultaneously colluding with the fractions to secretly protect the population, as much as possible, from the state, from taxation, conscription, and *corvée* labour. Quite typical was a *douar* in the CM of Ténès that lodged a petition with the prefect of Algiers accusing the *caid* and fraction headmen of collaborating with the tax assessors in calculating the annual tax allocations in the absence of the *djemâa*, the elected representatives of the people.[58] Initially the colonial administration attempted, through the *caids* and headmen, to manipulate the *djemâa* election by organizing counter-lists of loyalists but when this failed in 1947, as we will see in more detail in Chapter 9, the government resorted to systematic electoral fraud, violent repression and intimidation, imprisonment of militants, and annulment of elections to contain the nationalist surge.

In general I have emphasized the fact of deep multi-secular continuities in peasant society, and in particular the role of the fraction *djemâa*, to understand the way in which modern party politics were able to amalgamate with, or to build

[57] AOM 4i209, administrator CM Ténès to prefect of Algiers, 5 October 1950.
[58] AOM 1K/163, petition to the prefect of Algiers, 9 February 1948.

onto, these pre-existing organizations. However, it would be a mistake to assume that these small, often ad hoc assemblies, remained essentially unchanged from the precolonial period through to the War of Independence. More research needs to be done into the history of what, with good reason, administrators in the late nineteenth century referred to as 'clandestine' *djemâas*, bodies that often left no written record and resisted the colonial state through the age-old stratagems of passive resistance, deceit, and obfuscation.[59]

My argument on the roots of rural radicalism is, in general, close to the position of Hugh Roberts who, since his early fieldwork in Kabylie in the 1970s, has developed a sophisticated analysis of the crucial role of rural organizations and traditions, exemplified by the *djemâa*, in shaping the enduring political culture of the FLN, both during the War of Independence and for decades after.[60] Roberts notes that the *djemâa* culture completely suffused the FLN apparatus, and this was made possible since these assemblies and traditions were not, as often claimed, restricted to the Kabyles, but were 'broadly the same' across Algerian space among both Berber and Arabic-speaking peasants.[61] More recently, in *Berber Government*, Hugh Roberts has returned to investigate the historic roots of rural political organization by a micro-study of Kabylia, but in doing so has tended to emphasize, once again, the extraordinary exceptionalism of the Djurdjura mountains, to the neglect of the rest of Algeria so that the nature of this exceptionalism cannot be clearly established as long as the Tell remains a terra incognita.[62] The aim of *War in the Mountains* in exploring the Chelif is to begin the process of opening the door to a more comparative regional approach to this little understood field.

One of the key issues I will address is how far the reorganization of the *djemâa* by the colonial state, through the *sénatus* and Jonnart laws of 1863 and 1919, led to a significant reshaping of the 'traditional' assemblies. By the 1940s eighty years of official restructuring of fraction and *douar* life had left its mark, so that as communist and Messalist militants penetrated rural society they came into contact less with ancient and unchanging communal forms, than with the institutionalized procedures of the *douar-djemâa*, hybrid forms of activism that melded everyday rural politics with that of electoral party organization.

[59] M. Launay, *Paysans algériens*, 394, notes that peasants reserved the right to support the FLN according to whether 'orders from above suited them, and when they did not the FLN was on the receiving end of their inertia and cunning'.

[60] Hugh Roberts, 'The FLN: French Conceptions, Algerian Realities', ch. 8 in George Joffé (ed.), *North Africa: Nation, State, and Region* (London: Routledge, 1993), 111–41. The FLN was dominated by political traditions and was, 'essentially an elaborate pyramid of hierarchically related *djemâas*', and the democratic, egalitarian values of the village assembly (p. 130).

[61] H. Roberts, 'The FLN', 136. The anthropologist Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahra: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), ch. 5, 164–98, has provided recent confirmation of such a geographical reach of the *djemâas* during fieldwork in the southern Sahara of Algeria, including *djemâa* minutes recorded in a school exercise book from 1962.

[62] Hugh Roberts, *Berber Government: The Kabyle Polity in Pre-colonial Algeria* (London: I.B. Tauris), 2014.

7
The Communist Party and Peasant Mobilization, *c.*1932–48

The PPA-MTLD of Messali Hadj, and the FLN that broke away from it in 1954, was the dominant force in the growth of Algerian nationalism and the eventual formation of an armed insurrectionary movement. However, I have opted to focus in the next few chapters more on the Algerian Communist Party (PCA) for a number of reasons. The communists were particularly well organized in the Chelif region, which is why the Central Committee opted to base the first 'Red Maquis' (*Maquis Rouge*) there in 1956. The sophisticated party organization, with its national journals, central and local committee reports, printed propaganda, trade union structure, and memoirs, has left a far more detailed historic record than the clandestine PPA, as has the archival record of police, intelligence, and administrative reports. This makes it possible to piece together the structure of the communist organizations in the Chelif that spanned out from the towns into the interior in a way that is not possible for the Messalists, which remained more clandestine and have left a fragmentary trace. Moreover the problems faced by the largely urban-based PPA in propagandizing the countryside were not much different from that of the PCA.

Historians of Algerian nationalism, who have tended to work in a top-down direction, emphasize the bitter divisions at the centre between the Messalists and the PCA. But at the local level in the Chelif the situation appears quite different. In the small town societies of the region communist and nationalist militants were well known to each other, often participated in the same campaigns, and had a flexible relationship in which individuals frequently crossed the permeable boundary between the parties or participated in various attempts to develop a united front. PPA militants, for example, in the absence of a Messalist federal syndicate, tended until 1954 to work under the umbrella of the communist-led CGT federation. Thus much of the following analysis of Communist Party propaganda and organizational work with the peasantry sheds light also on the kinds of issues faced by the PPA, an urban-based movement that shared some of the difficulties of the PCA in making contact with, and adapting to, the reality of peasant society.

Communist policy in relation to Algerian rural society showed a deep tension between two currents, a dominant official position that directed the main organizational drive towards the proletarian agricultural workers, and a minority trend that sought links to the peasantry of the interior. In the Chelif the two tendencies

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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reflected the geo-political divide between the settler dominated plain and the mountain zone of the *commune mixte*.

For decades the Algerian communist movement was dominated by the French Communist Party (PCF) that in 1936 followed the Soviet Comintern in abandoning a Leninist doctrine of global anti-colonial insurrection.[1] From 1936 to 1946 the PCF and its satellite, the PCA, characterized the pro-Independence PPA as a dangerous movement allied to the fascists, denied the reality of an Algerian nation, and maintained that the future of the colony lay in a union with France. The PCA leadership reinforced this position, along with opposition to the dangers of peasant revolt, when it condemned the Sétif insurrection of May 1945 as a plot by the PPA that had conspired with feudal landholders and 'Hitlerite agents'.[2]

The Algerian Communist Party's rejection of the peasantry was further deepened by the fact that an 'orthodox' Marxist doctrine held a negative opinion of its revolutionary potential. Marx had famously described the peasantry as an inherently conservative force that, like a sack of potatoes, was devoid of class consciousness and cohesion.[3] A global revolution could only come about through a primary stage of proletarian liberation in the advanced capitalist states, so the eventual socialist revolution in colonial Algeria was dependent on a prior overthrow of capitalism in metropolitan France and, at second best, through a vanguard of urban and industrial workers in Algeria itself. This particularly suited many European communists who wished to defend their privileged position in the workplace and shared many of the racist prejudices of the '*petits-blanc*' *colons* and a visceral fear of the peasants massed in the interior. To follow the Comintern line and to support peasant insurrection was seen as 'race suicide' since it would simply empower the Algerian masses that would drive the Europeans into the sea.[4]

The first part of this chapter shows how Mohamed Marouf, the most important veteran communist and trade union leader in the Chelif between 1929 and 1954, faithfully implemented the central party line and, in doing so, impeded early attempts to organize among the mountain peasants. The second part shows how a more radical, grassroots movement in the PCA emerged after 1944, in particular

[1] For an overview, see Emmanuel Sivan, *Communisme et nationalisme en Algérie 1920–1962* (Paris: Presses FNSP, 1975); A. Drew, *We Are No Longer*; Jacques Jurquet, *La révolution nationale algérienne et le Parti communiste français*, 4 vols (Paris: Éditions du Centenaire, 1979–84); René Gallissot, *Maghreb-Algérie: classe et nation*, 2 vols (Paris: Arcantière, 1987), and *Algérie colonisée, Algérie algérienne (1870–1962). La république française et les indigènes* (Algiers: Barzakh Editions, 2007). From 1920 until 1936, Algeria constituted a 'region' of the French Communist Party. After the creation of the PCA in September 1936, the colonial party still remained under the heavy influence of the PCF and its agents.

[2] A. Drew, *We Are No Longer*, 146–53.

[3] On Marx and the peasantry, see Esther Kingston-Mann, *Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution* (Oxford: OUP, 1983); David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951).

[4] E. Sivan, *Communisme*, 24–39. The most well-known opposition to the Comintern line came from a resolution of the Sidi Bel Abbès section in 1922: 'An uprising of the mass of Algerian Muslims . . . would at the present moment be a dangerous madness.'

through the newly founded *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* (SPC), which in spite of central party doctrine began to take tentative steps towards propaganda work in the *douars*. Tracking this development allows us to gain an insight into how a primarily urban-based party began to adapt its organizational work and political culture, which had been first formed in the communist and trade union cells of France, Algiers, and Oran, to the patrimonial and clan-like structures of mountain society.

Mohamed Marouf: Trade Union Organization of Agricultural Workers

From the 1930s onwards the main drive of the Communist Party and its affiliated trade unions (CGT) to organize rural workers was directed towards the agricultural proletariat of the Chelif plain rather than towards the great mass of peasants in the surrounding mountains. The most influential figure here was Mohammed Marouf, a founding figure of Algerian nationalism, who played the key role in the organization of the anti-colonial movement in the Chelif region between 1929 and his death in prison in 1956. Marouf, who was born on 23 February 1895 at Bocca Ouled Bouali near Ponteba to the east of Orleansville, was raised in a family of poor peasant farmers located on the fringes of the Chelif plain.[5] Like many Algerian boys brought up in the piedmont, proximity to a small urban centre gave him access to a French primary school and a *Certificate d'études primaires* (CEP) that proved vital in his later promotion as a leading cadre.[6] At the end of the First World War he was recruited, like thousands of Algerians, to work in France where he operated with bomb disposal teams clearing the battlefields, before working in various factories and as a coal miner. During the 1920s Marouf became a leading cadre in the Communist Party in Paris, attended a Party school in Moscow, and joined the PCF Central Committee in 1926. He was active in the *Union intercoloniale* where he was associated with Ho Chi Minh and Messali Hadj, and was a founder member of the pro-independence *Etoile-nord africaine* (ENA). Marouf, who became a full-time trade union official in the CGTU, constantly travelled throughout France recruiting and organizing strikes, and it

[5] On Marouf's biographical details, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 457–60, and *Algérie colonisée*, 88, 92, 95; Benjamin Stora, *Dictionnaire biographique de militants nationalistes algériens, 1926–1954* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985), 57–9.

[6] A very similar career to Marouf's was that of Ben Ali Boukort, General Secretary of the PCA from 1936 to 1939, who came from a peasant background near Mazouna in the Chelif region to the west of Orleansville; see Ben Ali Boukort, *Le souffle du Dahra. La résistance algeriénne de 1924 a 1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013); also R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 159–61.

was primarily his experience as a syndicalist that he brought into the Chelif region after 1929.[7]

Marouf, like many inter-war migrant workers, had married a French woman, Odette, a Parisian metal worker, trade unionist, and communist militant, and the couple settled permanently on the family farm in 1933.[8] From this base Marouf, General Secretary of the CGT Algiers departmental Union of Agricultural Workers and Miners (*Syndicats d'ouvriers agricoles et miniers*), travelled constantly as a union organizer throughout the Algiers department and Chelif region.[9] Marouf worked closely for over a decade with Pierre Fayet, a member of the PCF central committee, who arrived in Algeria in 1932. Fayet was a key organizer of a wave of strikes in Algeria during the Popular Front period and played an important role in the 'Algerianization' of the PCA.[10] He was married to Sophie Fayet, from a Parisian family of Polish Jews, also a communist militant, Secretary of the Algier's women's section of the *Comité de lutte contre la guerre et le fascisme*, and editor of the party journal *La lutte sociale*.[11]

Marouf was primarily a trade unionist who studiously adhered to the party line, largely ignored the peasantry of the Dahra and Ouarsenis, and focused his organizational work on the waged, landless workers of the plain that best fitted the definition of a proletarian class. The standard political discourse of the Communist Party and CGT was one which attacked the great landowners, such as Henri Borgeaud, Dominique Bertagna, and Amédée Froger, who symbolized both an exploitative capitalism, as well as the élites that controlled the political system.[12] By focusing on the sector of advanced farming in the plain, the PCA was able to deploy an anti-capitalist rhetoric that was identical to that used to describe the urban and industrial workers that formed the core militant base of the party,

[7] In 1929 Marouf was sent by the PCF, during a period of intense repression, to reorganize the Algerian communist movement, but he was soon arrested, along with his brother, on 5 August 1929, and sentenced to six or nine months prison in a Saharan camp.

[8] AOM 12CAB155, prefect of Algiers Cabinet, 5 June 1956, fiche on Odette Marouf (née François) born in Paris 10 June 1905 describes her as a 'very active militant of the PCA. . . . She is essentially active in the Muslim milieux, in particular on market days when she openly preaches the revolt against France'.

[9] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 457. Police in the Chelif constantly tracked his movements; see for example, AOM 4i206, report of sub-prefect of Orleansville, 5 September 1938, on surveillance of Mohammed and Odette Marouf at their farmhouse during August 1938.

[10] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 285–6. He later played a significant role in Algerian post-war politics and was elected to the National Assembly in 1955.

[11] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 285–7. During the Second World War Pierre Fayet, arrested in March 1940, was eventually released from an Algerian prison camp in May 1943, but Sophie joined the Paris resistance, was arrested, and died in a concentration camp. Marouf, along with many communists, was likewise interned in Saharan camps under Vichy, during which many died from disease and harsh conditions.

[12] Younès Kouch, a key PCA organizer in rural Algeria, provided a clear summary of communist policy in his booklet, *Le problème de la terre et la question paysanne en Algérie* (Éditions Liberté, nd [*c.*1949]). An agrarian reform would ensure expropriation of the latifundia held by 'the hundred lords (*seigneurs*)' like Gratien Faure, and 'the big capitalist companies'. On Kouch, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 394–5; E. Sivan, *Communisme*, 171.

but ignored the plight of the peasant masses in the *douars*. However, the CGT faced considerable difficulty in reaching out to organize among the full-time agricultural workers that lived on the latifundia since trade union organizers could not easily approach those who were isolated on private estates that were heavily policed, while the large pool of casual labour that lived in *bidonvilles* on marginal land constituted an unstable and extremely impoverished lumpenproletariat.

The solution of the PCA to this problem was to co-ordinate, almost on a yearly basis, agricultural strikes in the rich plains of the Mitidja, Chelif, and Oranie, during the harvest and grape *vendanges* period when estate owners, anxious to bring in ripening crops, were most vulnerable and dependent on a massive influx of seasonal labour. Since the agricultural trade union was so fragile or non-existent on the big farms, Marouf tried to organize urban-based militants or miners, as a vanguard proletariat, to support strikes on the surrounding farms. The challenge to the interests of the powerful farming élite and the colonial state was met by a rapid and often violent response through the mobilization of gendarmes, *gardes mobiles*, and army units, while the *colons* formed their own estate workers into armed militias.[13]

Typical of the strong repressive reaction of the state came during a double wave of wheat harvest and *vendanges* strikes organized by the Blida CGT in the rich plains of the Mitidja, just to the east of the Chelif, in June and August 1948. CGT leaflets described how on the night of Sunday 13 June at 10.30 pm the gendarmes had attacked striking worker's houses, 'machine guns at the ready, the headlights of their vehicles focused on the doors of our houses. We were forced, under a constant barrage of stones, to leave our homes. As we came out we were grabbed, beaten and insulted in the presence of our wives and children who were in tears.'[14] The communists of Blida, including the *Union des femmes d'Algérie*, organized support by making a collection among shopkeepers in the town and requesting contributions of food, clothing, and medical supplies.

Despite the CGT and communist focus on organizational work among the agricultural workers from the 1930s to the early 1950s, this proved to be an uphill struggle.[15] During February to March 1948 Marouf co-ordinated a major drive, the '*Semaine agricole*', to expand the agricultural union through a series of meetings planned in over a hundred towns across the department of Algiers. Police reports from meetings in the Chelif noted a low attendance of farm workers, who tended to remain reticent or silent for fear of informers and being

[13] On the wave of annual harvest strikes, see Nora Bennallègue-Chaouia, *Algérie. Mouvement ouvrier et question nationale, 1919–1954* (Algiers: OPU, 2004), 179–83; R. Gallissot, *Algérie colonisée*, 106–8.

[14] AOM 1K/298, tract of the Blida central strike committee, 'Appeal to the Urban Population'.

[15] ANP F/2/4405, Sécurité Générale, *Synthèse quotidienne de renseignements*, Algiers, 6 January 1948, noted the general failure of the PCA in Algeria that was only able to recruit 2,000 of the 800,000 agricultural workers. A plan was drawn up to train five hundred urban militants on a one-week course in Algiers, 'to recruit, instruct and lead the agricultural workers'.

identified by their employers.[16] A meeting in Duperré on 29 February, as part of the *Semaine agricole* campaign, was able to establish a new CGT section of agricultural workers, but significantly the five-man bureau was composed of two railwaymen, a school teacher, an employee of the highway department (*Ponts et chaussées*), and only one farm worker, Slimane Brahouat.[17] Boualem Bourouiba, a leading figure in the Messalist trade union movement, later remarked on the considerable problems faced by the CGT in retaining those few agricultural workers that were recruited and shaping them into a durable organization. They, like the seasonal migrants, were an unstable force, 'Closely watched by the European foremen they were fired as soon as they showed any signs of joining the fight for their rights. The solidarity of urban workers towards the rural labourers ran up against the private estates of the *colons*. As soon as you left the urban zones you entered into the lands of the lords of the earth. They laid down the law.'[18] Communist militants who lived in the small townships faced very real dangers from the henchmen of the big estate owners.[19]

Marouf's campaign to gain a foothold among the agricultural labourers faced considerable difficulties. Owners and managers on the big estates of the plain tended to house as few permanent Algerian workers as possible on the farms for security reasons. The *colons*, who suffered from a permanent state of insecurity, inhabited fortified farmhouses, and distrusted their own workers, apart from a core of armed retainers. The *colons* reduced their dependence on Algerian labour as much as possible through high levels of investment in mechanization. A class of skilled workers, drivers of tractors and combine harvesters, mechanics, vine dressers, blacksmiths, and foremen, whom it was in the managerial interest to retain as full-time workers, tended to live all year round with their families on or near the estate. Some of these relatively privileged workers were given access to small plots of land where they could build houses, cultivate gardens, and keep poultry.[20] This small class of deferential workers tended to be more closely tied, and loyal to, the *colons* and Algerian élites, and in times of trouble were often

[16] AOM 1K/298, sub-prefect of Miliana to prefect of Algiers, 27 April 1948: 'the influence of the CGT in the agricultural milieu is extremely weak.'

[17] AOM 1K/298, report of Lt Tibere Inglesse, commander of the Gendarmerie section at Affreville, 6 March 1949. In a CGT meeting in Miliana, most of the 250 men present were miners from Zaccar under orders from their CGT leaders to reinforce the numbers.

[18] Bourouiba Boualem, *Les syndicalistes algériens. Leur combat de l'éveil à la libération* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998), 105.

[19] Communist school teachers, in particular, were exposed to the violence of local landowners, see the autobiography of Jacqueline Guerroudj, *Des douars*, 8–12, on the threats of the powerful Dollfuss, who had a private airstrip on his estate, and Lisette Vincent, who was forced to flee her school apartment when it was invaded by a mob led by the mayor, shouting '*A mort les Vincent!*', Jean-Luc Einaudi, *Un rêve algérien. Histoire de Lisette Vincent, une femme d'Algérie* (Paris: PUF, 2001), 83–5.

[20] Interview with Abdelkader Klouch, Chlef, 20 November 2014. His father, appreciated as a skilled worker by Bastien Durand, owner of the farm of Saint-Victor to the west of Orleansville, was granted a plot on which he constructed a thatched *gourbis* in the 1930s.

prepared to serve as guards or vigilantes to fend off night-time robbers, trade union activists, and, after 1954, marauding guerrilla bands.

The failure of Marouf and the CGT to develop a policy or strategy that could reach out to the peasants massed in the *douars*, beyond the perimeter of the plain, was further confirmed by its focus on the extension of full metropolitan social security rights, which could only be of relevance to waged, agricultural workers. Speakers at the *Semaine agricole* meeting in Duperré on 29 February 1948 emphasized the poverty of the 800,000 agricultural workers in Algeria 'with their low pay while their comrades in the factories gain 130 francs the hour. In France, there is no difference, a worker, no matter what his race, is held in esteem.'[21] At a final Conference on 14 March that concluded the *Semaine agricole*, Marouf put forward the standard CGT platform, to achieve parity between European labourers and Algerian agricultural workers, the control of minimum pay through the wage boards, application of Social Security legislation to Algeria, extension of family allowances, and improvement in housing and unemployment benefits,[22] demands that were largely irrelevant to the circumstances of the great mass of subsistence peasants in the *douars*.

Marouf and the CGT leaders tended to view the peasantry in a highly negative light as providing a reservoir of cheap labour which, lacking in any proletarian consciousness, was manipulated by capitalist landowners to undercut the wages and conditions of agricultural labourers in the plain. The *colons* could tap in to a large pool of labour whenever the need arose, and did not have to carry any of the social or welfare costs of maintaining such a labour reserve.[23] Peasants were regarded as the 'objective' enemies of the more advanced workers of the plain, almost a form of blackleg labour. During the 1948 CGT strike the Secretary of the *Section fédérale des ouvriers agricoles* wrote to the sub-prefect of Blida, pointing out how the wealthy *colons* like Borgeaud and Germain, were sending recruitment agents into the mountainous regions of the Sud, Djelfa, Chelif, Orleansville, the Sersou, Tiaret, Berroughia, and elsewhere. This 'immoral coalition organized by certain big *colons*', was having a disastrous impact on agricultural workers at Beni Tamou and Beni Salah in the plain, who were already facing high levels of unemployment.[24] The sub-prefect confirmed to Algiers that seasonal recruitment was indeed being used by the *colons* not only to lower farm wages, but also to

[21] AOM 1K/298, RG report, 6 March 1948.

[22] AOM 1K/298, RG report, 15 March 1948.

[23] The situation in the Chelif was similar to that in the Mitidja to the east where the geographer Georges Mutin showed that in 1950, 52,888 seasonal workers were employed for 18,822 permanent workers. About half of the latter travelled in daily from the piedmont or *bidonvilles*: Georges Mutin, *La Mitidja. Décolonisation et espace géographique* (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 1977), 427. Thus about 13 per cent of the total workforce resided on the estates.

[24] AOM 1K/298, Secretary [signature illegible] *Section fédérale*, Algiers, to sub-prefect of Blida, 25 August 1948.

inflict a harsh discipline on the workers in the plain who had participated in the June harvest strike and had been 'infected' by syndicalism.[25]

Despite the deflection of communist activism in the Chelif from the peasantry to agricultural workers, Marouf's thirty-year trade union campaign undoubtedly had a major, if indirect impact, on the radicalization of the mountain regions. During the 1930s, and after the Second World War, Marouf, in line with the proletarian vanguard doctrine, focused his trade union work on the industrial sector of the Chelif, including among construction workers at Oued Fodda involved in the giant Steeg Dam and irrigation project, and in the zinc and iron-ore mines at Bou Caid, Rouina, Miliana, and Beni Haoua. As a result, as we will see later (Chapter 10), this radicalized peasant-workers who walked daily from their small family-run farms to labour in factories and mines, and through their experience of wage labour and trade unionism, carried militant ideas back into the interior. During the autumn of 1938, for example, the CGT organized a strike against the giant civil engineering firm Campenon at Oued Fodda during which the union leader Palacio exposed the role of the local *caid* as a gang-master involved in hiring, policing, and sacking workers, while Jean Roger Douence was arrested and prosecuted for a 'subversive' speech in which he attacked the racism of *colons* that treated Algerians as 'savages', denied them education, and left them to rot 'in disease-ridden *gourbis*'.[26]

The *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs*: Organizing a Peasant Union

From the early 1930s, despite the opposition of the Algiers leadership, a significant current developed within the Communist Party that was increasingly sympathetic to Algerian nationalism, independence, and a peasant-based revolutionary strategy. In February 1934 André Ferrat, a senior Paris communist, had been sent on a mission to Algeria after which he endorsed what amounted to a Fanonist position before the letter, the primacy of a peasant revolution: 'Through its mass and its fundamental demands the peasantry constitutes the most powerful driving force

[25] AOM 1K/298, sub-prefect of Blida to prefect of Algiers, 6 September 1948. The hill peasants, he claimed, were isolated from the subversive impacts of the trade unions and communists and were more 'docile' and harder workers. Peasant recruits had a disciplinary impact on the labourers of the *douar* Béni Tamou, 'well known for their bad state of mind, who had started the harvest strikes of last June and had almost systematically refused all offers of work'.

[26] AOM 4i206, report of sub-prefect of Orleansville, 5 September 1938. Marouf, in an article 'Repression in the Chelif Plain', *L'Algérie ouvrière*, 5 May 1939, reported that Douence was to be tried in Orleansville on 11 May for 'subversive words against France'. If *colons* persisted in denying Algerians their rights, and kept them in bondage, claimed Douence, the metropolitan French, 'will join forces with you to chuck them into the sea!'.

of the revolutionary anti-imperialist movement.'[27] A new PCA should be created, he claimed, that was capable of leading 'the national agrarian revolution', a task that could never be carried out as long as the party was dominated by Europeans. 'Never would a party composed essentially of French workers—who are privileged in relation to the native proletariat and who most of the time have no links to the native peasantry (that's to say numerically by far the most important engine of the revolution)—never could they achieve this task.'[28] But after the Franco-Soviet pact of May 1935 the Comintern line was to oppose any form of anti-colonial struggle, including Algerian nationalism, that would weaken French imperialism. André Ferrat was rapidly marginalized in the PCF, driven from the central committee, and excluded from the party in July 1936.[29]

While the agrarian policy of the PCA was focused on the proletariat of agricultural labourers and nationalization of the capitalist landowners, a significant grassroots movement dedicated specifically to the support of peasant activism, the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* (SPC), appeared in early 1944 under the leadership of Abdelhamid Boudiaf and Mohammed Badsi.[30] In the face of the massive crisis in rural Algeria during 1944–5 marked by the explosion of popular nationalism, a severe famine, and the Sétif insurrection, the central party leadership in Algiers was unable to keep the lid on a grassroots drive towards a peasant revolution. The SPC, which has received little attention from historians, was placed on a more solid foundation on 16 March 1945 when delegate conferences were held in the three departments, followed by a central conference in Algiers on 19 March, representing 7,100 members that elected a Federal Bureau and Executive Committee.[31] Among the nine elected to the central bureau and

[27] André Ferrat, 'Le mouvement révolutionnaire en Algérie', *Cahiers du bolchévisme*, 15 March 1935, 338–9; see above Chapter 2, pp. 54–5, the Radiguet mission of 1932.

[28] André Ferrat, 'La question de la révolution en Algérie et l'idéologie colonialiste', *Cahiers du bolchévisme* (1935), 754.

[29] Thomas-Adrian, Schweitzer, 'Le Parti communiste français, le Comintern et l'Algérie dans les années 1930', *Mouvement social* 78 (1972), 133; R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 290–1; Ferrat later joined the Socialist Party, and was active in the Resistance, but resigned from the SFIO in June 1956 in opposition to Guy Mollet's policy in Algeria.

[30] See R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 150–1, on the first General Secretary of the SPC, Abdelhamid Boudiaf, born in 1919 into a peasant family at M'Sila on the southern fringes of the Hodna Mountains. He was a peasant organizer in this region, as well as further east in Biskra and the Aurès mountains. In 1956 he was the key co-ordinator of the communist Red Maquis in the Dahra. His cousin Mohammed Boudiaf was a future FLN leader and later President of Algeria, assassinated in June 1992. On Mohamed Badsi, soon to become Secretary of the SPC Federation, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 78.

[31] See Abderrahim Taleb Bendiab, *Chronologie des faits et mouvements sociaux et politiques en Algérie 1830–1954* (Algiers: Imprimerie du Centre, 1983), 67, online at <http://www.socialgerie.net/spip.php?article1169_p62_p89.pdf>. On 16 March 1945 delegate conferences were held simultaneously in Oran (representing 1,729 members), Algiers (2,130 members), and Constantine (1,693 members). Three days later the national foundation conference on 19 March recorded 7,100 members. Jean-Luc Einaudi, *Un algérien, Maurice Laban* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 1999), 89.

executive were leading activists of the peasant current who, after 1955, were to play a key role in the creation of the Red Maquis.[32]

Before looking at SPC activism in the Chelif region during 1944–8, we turn back to examine how a national grassroots peasant movement developed within the PCA from 1932 onwards, and in particular in four mountain zones, the Aurès, the Blida Atlas, the Dahra-Ouarsenis, and the Tlemçen Atlas. This minority current, although constantly stifled by the PCF, gives an insight into how forces were gathering across rural Algeria for a revolutionary peasant movement that would eventually discard the reformism of the central party. In general the current found a support base among two kinds of militant. First were the middle peasants, relatively better-off small farmers who, with an intimate knowledge of the peasant condition and culture, expressed forms of activism that were embedded in the reality of the rural community. Secondly, were the educated Europeans and Algerians, many of them from the liberal professions, who as rural teachers, doctors, and lawyers came into close daily contact with the shocking poverty, hardship, and violent racial discrimination of the *douars*. These militants could often speak Arabic or Berber dialects and had a deep empathy with the culture, language, and daily lives of the rural population.

The best known of the pro-peasant communist militants, who achieved posthumous fame after his death in the Ouarsenis guerrilla in June 1956, was Maurice Laban, born in Biskra on 30 October 1914. Laban's parents were teachers in the '*école indigène*' of Biskra, so that he and his sister were the only European children in the school and both became distinctly 'arabicized' in their culture.[33] The Laban family acquired land in the oasis of Sidi Okba, south-east of Biskra, where they produced dates and raised sheep, and Maurice through his intermittent spells farming the land over two decades had close contact with local agricultural workers and peasants.

Laban later ascribed his support for national liberation to this intimate experience of rural life in which, unlike most *colons*, he had close friendships with

[32] The five elected to the Federal Bureau were Mohamed Zitoufi (President), Paul Estorges (Secretary General), Abdelkader Nasri (Treasurer), Mohamed Badsi (Deputy Secretary), Ahmed Boukhartel (Archivist), and four executive committee members, Abdelhamid Boudiaf, Alloua Abbas (nephew of Ferhat Abbas), Meddour, and Chentouf. AOM 1K/485, contains a file of police and administrative reports and intercepted SPC correspondence, 1945–6. The Secretary General Paul Estorges, like his parents, taught in *écoles indigènes* in the Aurès and elsewhere between 1920 and 1932 and was a fluid speaker of Kabyle and Arabic. Based mainly in Constantine after 1932, where he headed the communist section, Estorges had prime responsibility for extending the SPC peasant union throughout the eastern department, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 266–7; *L'Echo d'Alger*, 27 March 1940, Estorges was given an eight-month prison sentence in the Constantine tribunal for distributing pro-Soviet tracts, a sentence that was increased to one year by the Appeal Court in Algiers. In June 1955 Estorges provided Abdelkader Guerroudj with clandestine hiding in his Algiers flat in the Rue Edith Cavel, and forged identity papers before he joined the underground.

[33] On Maurice Laban, see Jean-Luc Einaudi, *Un algérien*; R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 397–403. Before the decree of March 1949 that ended the '*enseignement spéciale*' reserved for Algerian children, the latter were segregated from the European schools.

Algerians, like the Debabèche brothers with whom he was at school.[34] Laban explained why he joined the Algerian Communist Party in 1936: he was 'in closer contact with the natives of the countryside than with the Europeans. I was a relentless, pro-Arab anti-colonialist; I felt the necessity for the creation of an Algerian nation.'[35]

A further example of the type of cultural broker who bridged between the urban-based work of the Communist Party and the world of the peasantry was Mekki Chebbah, who was born into a peasant family at Sidi Okba, not far from the Laban farm. Mekki emigrated to Paris in 1924 and helped found the ENA, but returned home in 1929 to open a *café maure* in Sidi Okba. In 1930 he left the ENA for the Communist Party, despite the fact that he was deeply religious and active in Ben Badis's AUMA.[36] During the crisis that followed the assassination of the *muphti* of Algiers in August 1936, an obscure plot to damage the AUMA, Chebbah became a folk hero when the feudal *bachaga* Ben Gana closed his café, tied him behind a horse and dragged him seventy-five kilometres to the prison at Ouled Djellal.

After the Second World War Chebbah revived his theatrical troop, *Le flambeau théatral algérien*, and used it as an instrument of popular propaganda to win support for the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs*, of which he was a founder member.[37] Chebbah was part of a generation of Algerian communists that worked to transform the PCA in the direction of an identity politics that was fully grounded in Islam and Arab-Berber language and culture, a strategy that was to prove vital in building forms of activism that were attuned to the world of the rural masses.[38]

[34] On the four Debabèche brothers of Biskra who were all active in the PCA, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 236–7.

[35] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 397. Laban was soon involved in an unprecedented challenge to the feudal *bachaga* Ben Gana when he raided his palatial house and seized illegal stocks of cereals, semolina and chickpeas which were distributed via the Red Cross to school cantines and popular soup kitchens. Laban was in close touch with the Aurès leader Ben Boulaid who began to arm and train guerrilla forces from 1948 onwards; see Jean Morizot, *L'Aurès ou le mythe de la montagne rebelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991), 267–71; J.-L. Einaudi, *Un algérien*, 122–3, 133, 157–8. The PCA leadership stopped Laban joining the FLN maquis in 1954, but Laban, a trained chemist, manufactured explosives for the rebels.

[36] Chebbah was particularly close to the young militant Reda Houhou who was to become a major figure in the *Ulema* association. When challenged by Ben Badis in 1936 Chebbah argued that religious reformism and communism were perfectly compatible: R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 215.

[37] Small itinerant theatre and orchestral groups played an important part in the creation of a nationalist popular culture; see Jane E. Goodman, 'Acting with One Voice: Producing Unanimism in Algerian Reformist Theater', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55.1 (2013), 167–97.

[38] Another communist militant who worked closely with the *Ulema* reformists and the local religious confraternity deep in the Aurès was the school teacher Paul Coussard, based from 1934 or 1935 at Menâa. Coussaud born in 1909, the son of a blacksmith in the Charente, trained as a teacher in Angoulême (1925–8) and after military service in Biskra, settled in Algeria. He joined the Communist Party in the late 1920s, and in the 1930s was the Batna inspector of the '*écoles indigènes*', during which he travelled throughout the Aurès, using the opportunity to spread the communist message: see Julien Fromage, 'Innovation politique', 101; Fanny Colonna, *Les versets de l'invincibilité. Permanence et changements religieux dans l'Algérie contemporaine* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1995), 318–19; R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 222–3; J. Morizot, *L'Aurès*, 206.

Typical of this deep grounding of communist cadres in Algerian culture was the Sportisse family in Constantine.[39] The Sportisse brothers, Lucien, Bernard, and William, grew up in the large Jewish community of Constantine and, despite the acquisition of full French nationality under the Crémieux law of 1871, they shared a way of life that was as close to that of poor urban Arabs as to the French. Their mother, Sarah Guedj, who was of Berber-Jewish descent, spoke only Arabic and shared the dress and culture of Algerian women.[40] Lucien Sportisse, the older of the Sportisse brothers was, like his Constantinois associates Maurice Laban and Paul Estorges, a teacher who shared a particular interest in the peasantry, and played an active role as an organizer of agricultural workers. Lucien Sportisse, who opposed the Comintern U-turn to abandon the radical anti-colonial struggle, told a meeting in Constantine in November 1936, 'Our group wants the complete liberation of the Arab people', and they intended to create 'in all the important centres a Peasant Committee (*Comité des fellahs*). These, inspired by us, will gather together the Arab peasants and will militate in the countryside.'[41] William notes of his brother, 'The fact that he spoke Arabic and could speak to Algerians in their own language made him a particularly dangerous adversary for the colonial administration', which finally moved him, in a standard form of administrative expulsion, by posting him to France.[42]

William Sportisse, who in late 1945 became a full-time organizer of the *Jeunesses communistes* (JC) in the Constantinois, travelled extensively through the Aurès mountains, and made contact with Maurice Laban in Biskra. He was surprised to find, as did Jacqueline Guerroudj in the Oran region, that a high level of militancy and organization already existed among the peasant youth in the interior. At the *douar* Zellatou near Arris he was welcomed by the JC youth who lined up and 'began to sing *nachids*, the patriotic songs of combat, and I had to pass along their ranks like a general inspecting his troops!'.[43]

The Federal secretary of the newly formed *Syndicate des petits cultivateurs*, Mohammed Badsi, with his brother Si Ahmed, also had a long experience of organization among rural workers in the Tlemçen region, especially during the mass strikes of 1936. Since they too opposed the new anti-fascist Comintern line they were accused by the central party leadership of 'nationalism' and their local cell was closed down.[44] However, Mohammed Badsi continued his militant

[39] William Sportisse and Pierre-Jean Le Foll-Luciani, *Le camp des oliviers. Parcours d'un communiste algérien* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

[40] On the rich, inter-ethnic culture of urban Jews, see Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria 1937–1962* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

[41] Cited in W. Sportisse, *Le camp*, 67, from Constantine B 3322, note from *Sûreté départementale du Constantine,* 17 November 1936. A further police report of 17 December 1936 noted Lucien Sportisse' presence in the Café Zannettacci, 'with five natives all wearing the symbol of the *Étoile nord-africaine*'.

[42] W. Sportisse, *Le camp*, 55–6, 68. Lucien later joined the French Resistance and was murdered by a fascist police officer in Lyon.

[43] W. Sportisse, *Le camp*, 107.

[44] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 78–9.

activity as a CGT leader of the Agricultural Workers Union, extended his organizational work among the peasants located in the mountains to the east and south of the city, and in 1944–5 created a branch of the *Syndicate des petits cultivateurs* before becoming Federal Secretary. In 1950 when the French communist militant Jacqueline Guerroudj was posted to a mountain school at Ain Fezza in the same area she was particularly surprised to discover that the surrounding villages, especially the hamlet of Ouchba, already had a well-established organization that was led by two peasant militants, Tahar Ghomri and Mejoub Berrahou, both SPC activists.[45]

Tahar Ghomri, the most iconic of the communist peasant leaders, an austere figure dressed in turban and the long, flowing *djellabah* of the peasantry, was born in the mountain village of Ouchba in 1909.[46] The communist leader and journalist Henri Alleg described Ghomri as an 'extraordinary type of the peasant communist, tall, handsome, so thin as to be almost diaphonous, but luminous like a stained-glass figure. Semi-literate and yet steeped in a profound humanism, at the same time very religious and very tolerant towards those that practised no faith.'[47] Tahar, like his brothers, was a highly religious man who had been active in the *Ulema* association before joining the PCA in 1946. A charismatic village leader, able to read and write Arabic, he was respected for his wisdom and deep knowledge of indigenous culture and Islam.

His close associate Mejdoub Berrahou, born in 1912 in the *douar* Oum el Allou, to the north of Ouchba, came into contact with the Badsi brothers as an agricultural worker during the strikes of the 1930s, and in 1951 he led a major *vendanges* strike at Lamoricière (Ain Nahala), during which hundreds of men stormed the gendarmes barracks to rescue an imprisoned PCA militant, cut down telephone and electricity posts, and occupied the town of Descartes.[48] Ghomri and Berrahou established a number of communist cells in the *douars* of the Tlemçen mountains, organizations that as in other parts of rural Algeria, were adapted from the traditional assemblies of village elders, the *djemâas*.

July and August of 1946 saw a major watershed in the post-war evolution of the PCA, one marked by the removal of the First Secretary Omar Ouzegane who was

[45] J. Guerroudj, *Des douars*, 28; and interview in Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne (ed.), *Des femmes dans la guerre*, 181–7. Jacqueline, née Netter, born in Rouen in 1919, married a professor of philosophy Pierre Minne who was appointed to the college De Slane in Tlemçen in 1947–8. She soon after remarried to Abdelkader ['Djilali'] Guerroudj, another teacher, and the couple were to play a major role, first in carrying out propaganda work in the Tlemçen countryside, and subsequently in preparing the PCA maquis and armed urban groups in Algiers; see R. Gallissot (ed.), *Dictionnaire*, 316–18; author interviews with Abdelkader Guerroudj, Algiers, 28 and 31 January 2012. Jacqueline's daughter, Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, who was captured by the French army in the ALN maquis in 1957, later became the pioneer historian of the Algerian women's movement during the War of Independence.

[46] Photograph of Ghomri and Berrahou in J. Guerroudj, *Des douars*, 19.

[47] Henri Alleg, Abdelhamid Benzine, and Boualem Khalfa, *La grande aventure d'Alger républicain* (Paris: Éditions Delga, 2012), 76.

[48] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 136.

held responsible for the highly damaging anti-nationalist position during the Sétif crisis that resulted in the communists losing ground to the Messalists. This shift was soon accompanied by the promotion onto the prestigious central committee of a number of peasant militants, among them Tahar Gomri (1947), Medjoub Berrahou (1949), Abdallah Mokarnia (1947), and Mohammed Guerrouf (1949), or activists that were known for their organizational work in rural areas, including Laid Lamrani, Abdelhamid Boudiaf, Maurice Laban, Georges Raffini, William Sportisse, and Lakhdar Kaidi.[49] The rapid extension of the SPC into many rural areas had prepared the way for the peasant question to move firmly onto the agenda of the central Communist Party. In December 1948 the Central Committee sent out a directive to extend party activity by organizing directly with the *douars* through 'a constant liaison with the peasant masses'.[50]

The process of so-called 'Algerianization' was accompanied by a drive in the PCA to accept in a more positive way Arab and Berber language, culture, and history, as well as Islamic faith, as an integral part of communist activism. Up until the 1940s many Algerian militants of peasant origin that rose within the ranks of the Party did so by acquiring the primary school-leaving certificate (CEP) and moved into the ranks of the urban-based organization, dominated by Europeans, and in doing so they tended to distance themselves from the poverty and superstitious world of their childhood, and to associate themselves in dress, culture, and ideology with secular French republicanism and modernity. Their peasant roots were a cause of embarrassment, rather than a point of pride, and the anti-peasant bias of orthodox Marxism and of European urban culture created a type of ex-peasant who showed little empathy with rural society, even when he knew it intimately, and associated the terrible poverty of childhood with a primitive universe that needed to be radically erased by socialist modernity.[51] However, from a turning-point around 1947–8, militants began to assume a more direct and confident identity *as* peasants, a shift that was closely linked to the change in direction towards a peasant-based revolutionary movement.

Party ideologues sought to reconcile traditional Algerian culture and Islam with socialism, and one place they looked for answers to this tangled issue was the Soviet Union. The Algerian communists became fascinated with Soviet Central Asia at this time since it seemed to offer strong comparison with Algeria and offered a blueprint of how a feudal Muslim society had been able to free itself from

[49] By April 1947 the Central Committee had twenty-three Algerians to twenty-five Europeans, indicative of a shift in the balance of forces away from the latter.

[50] ANP F/60/1461.

[51] F. Colonna, *Savants paysans*, 248–55, notes how Algerian teachers of rural origin trained at the college of Bouzaréa showed in the early 1900s deep prejudice towards the barbarous 'fanaticism' of the peasantry. By the 1930s this was undergoing change, and teachers began to cope with a love-hate ambiguity by presenting rural life in a folkloric way. But, as with the writer Mouloud Feraoun, this took the form of a distancing effect, in which it was rare to find phrases like, '*les gens de chez nous*' or '*dans ma famille*'.

the colonial domination of Tzarist Russia, and achieved national independence within a federal system as well as economic modernization, while fully supporting the Uzbek language, culture, and religious practice. It was living proof, argued General Tubert, who headed a delegation to the Soviet Union, of the fact that Marxism and Islam far from being incompatible, as many Messalists claimed, could co-exist and achieve an ideal balance between revolutionary modernization and religion.[52]

Tahar Ghomri was among the party of delegates that were selected to accompany General Tubert, on a tour of the USSR, including Soviet Central Asia, in 1950.[53] Among the other Algerian delegates was the journalist and writer Kateb Yacine, the Secretary General of the Ben-Badis Institute in Constantine and protégée of Mekki Chebbah, Ahmed Redha Houhou, the Oran dockworker, Mohamed Boualem, another Oran trade unionist, Merad, and an agricultural trade unionist from Bône, Zobeir Hebbaz.[54] At the request of the delegates the official visit to Moscow and Stalingrad was extended to Tashkent, so that they could see for themselves how socialism, nationalism, and Islam had been reconciled under the Soviets. They were astonished, reported Tubert, by the emancipation of Muslim women who had full and equal access to education and employment and could be seen everywhere as bus and lorry drivers, doctors, engineers, and senior administrators. This may have made an impact on Ghomri's acceptance of female communist activism in Ochba, including that of his own daughter Halima.[55]

In a photograph of the Tashkent delegation the tall figure of Tahar Ghomri stands out from the rest of the group in their European suits and ties, in his distinctive traditional dress, the *djellaba*, *chéche*, and heavy boots of the peasant.[56] Ghomri's dress code was not a sign of eccentricity or poverty but typical of other communist peasant delegates to Algiers and other cities at this time, an assertion of a new self-confident peasant identity that marked them off from an older generation of cadres like Marouf who wore a European style of clothing.

[52] On the delegation, see General Tubert, *L'Ouzbékistan république Soviétique* (Paris: Éditions du Pavillon, 1951); Vincent Monteil, 'Essai sur l'Islam en URSS', *Revue des études islamiques* 20 (1952), 11, and Supplément (1953), 7.

[53] Tubert, a respected member of the Algiers resistance in 1942, mayor of Algiers in 1945, and deputy in the first Constituent National Assembly, was appointed head of a commission to investigate the Sétif massacre in May 1945, but he was ordered by de Gaulle to abandon the mission. See J.-P. Peyroulou, *Guelma, 1945*, 90–1, 175, 175–80. He was close to the PCA. The 'Tubert Report' is in Marcel Reggui, *Les massacres de Guelma, Algérie, Mai 1945: une enquête inédite sur la furie des milices coloniales* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), app. 1, 137–68.

[54] Kateb Yacine wrote a series of articles, 'Dix mille kilomètres en URSS' in the communist *Alger républicain*, 11 to 22 December 1950. In 1956 Mohamed Boualem was one of those who evaded capture when the Red Maquis was decimated in the Ouarsenis.

[55] See the interview with Halima Ghomri in Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, *Des femmes*, 100–3.

[56] V. Monteil, *Supplement*, photo 6. Medjoub Berrahou, who also joined the Central Committee, likewise wore a turban, Turkish trousers, and working boots; see J. Guerroudj, *Des douars*, 19. A rare photograph of the young peasant leader Mokarnia also shows him in traditional dress.

In conclusion, while the central committee of the Algerian Communist Party remained throughout the period 1936 to *c.*1948 opposed to a peasant-centred strategy, a significant minority current that had close contact with mountain society was at work preparing the ground for an eventual shift towards a rural insurrection. The following two chapters (8 and 9) turn next to look at how the growing impetus to organize among the peasantry was instigated in the Chelif region and, in particular, in the rural areas surrounding the small town of Duperré (Ain Defla).

8
Peasant Organization in the Urban Centres

The *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* created in 1944 brought into a single network the pro-peasant militants that had emerged in different locations across northern Algeria. The Chelif region had a particularly strong presence in the union since the SPC President, the peasant farmer Hadj Mohamed Zitoufi, was active as head of the *djemâa* in the *douar* Taourira in the Dahra mountains to the east of Ténès. He worked closely with the young miner's trade unionist Abdallah Mokarnia of the neighbouring *douar* of Beni Haoua and Mustapha Saadoun further to the east in Cherchell.[1] All three, as we will see later (Chapter 9), played a major role in establishing the peasant networks that provided the organizational base for the communist and ALN maquis.

This chapter is focused on the part played by petitions in peasant opposition to local government, an often over-looked form of mobilization that can tell us a great deal about the way in which opposition to colonialism began to build up in the decades before the 1954 insurrection.[2] We look first at how peasant opposition was organized in the urban centres through what Edouard Lynch has called 'petition-demonstrations', in particular through a study of communist militants in the small town of Duperré, before looking at a second type of letter-petition that was often addressed directly by *djemâas* to higher-level authorities in Algiers.[3] This concludes by looking at the complaints that were made against particular corrupt or failing *caids* and how the administration, by failing to promote capable *caids* or to weed out the incompetent, reigned over a highly dysfunctional system.

[1] It seems likely that the SPC grew out from, or in opposition to, an earlier *Fédération des fellahs* headed by the conservative politician Abdelkader Cadi in 1937; see *Echo d'Alger*, 9 June 1937, and 26 February 1938. Although a close collaborator with Vichy, Cadi became a member of the 1943 Reform Commission, and was elected deputy for Constantine in 1946 and re-elected 1951: see J. Bouveresse, *Délégations* 2.733, 741. Mohamed Zitoufi, became a delegate for the CM of Ténès when a *Fédération des fellahs* for the department of Algiers was formed in June 1937. Although the *Fédération* was dominated by a conservative élite, it campaigned for a similar programme to that of the SPC, the defence of small farmers and peasants and for a reform that included a halt to expropriation, the transfer of state lands to the poor, a reform and democratization of the SIP, less punitive taxes and forest regulation, and investment in *douar* infrastructures (schools, water supply, medical care).

[2] On the rich potential of petitions for the study of rural society in North Africa, see John Chalcraft, 'Engaging the State'.

[3] Édouard Lynch, *Insurrections paysannes. De la terre à la rue. Usages de la violence au XXe siècle* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2019), uses the term 'manifestation-petitions'.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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Ahmed Keddar and Street Demonstrations in Duperré

Both communist and nationalist militants, located mainly in the urban centres of the Chelif region, found it much easier to carry out propaganda work among the peasants when they came into town, especially on market day, rather than travelling out to make direct contact with rural society. Militants who did venture into the mountains found to their cost, as did the French army after 1954, that there were no pre-existing groupings or social gatherings that they could approach, since there were no villages, and the population was scattered throughout the forests in isolated farmhouses that could take many hours to reach by mule tracks, and which were defended as private zones by thick walls of bush and cactus.[4]

It was also dangerous for urban militants to go into the interior since *caids* and headmen instructed the local population to inform on any suspect 'intruders' or vehicles and, if they were intercepted, they ran the very real risk of assault and imprisonment. The young teacher and communist activist Gaston Donnat, who later played a major part in the preparation of the Red Maquis in the Chelif region, describes how in 1933 he travelled by train from Algiers to a clandestine, night-time meeting with Kabyle seasonal workers engaged in the grape harvest. Forty anxious young men in rags gathered at night under a road bridge, but within minutes they had to break up the meeting and escape into the dark as the gendarmes moved in.[5] Communist militants were relatively safe in the towns but those who lived isolated in the countryside, notably school teachers, were constantly exposed to threats and violence by local landowners, and their henchmen.[6]

For the widely dispersed peasants of the mountains the forms of daily socialization that in Kabylia were to be found in the nuclear village were served by the weekly market. In addition the object of their discontent, the *caids* and CM administrators, could not be easily targeted, apart from the rare assassination, since they were rarely to be seen in the *douar* and peasants were exposed to the recriminatory power of the *caid* and his armed henchmen. The obvious focus for any protest were the bureaux of the *caids* and CM administrators that were usually located in the towns, a frequent point of friction or volatile protest as angry peasants queued for food rations, loans, and employment.

For the authorities the marketplace had, since the early years of French conquest, been a suspect space that needed to be carefully policed since it offered a traditional point of political mobilization for scattered tribesmen. During the

[4] Annick Lacroix, 'Histoire sociale', 677, in the Chelif in 1946 peasants would not even allow Algerian postmen to deliver mail to their homes.

[5] Gaston Donnat, *Afin que nul n'oublie. L'itinéraire d'un anti-colonialiste. Algérie-Cameroun-Afrique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), 31–3.

[6] Jacqueline Guerroudj, *Des douars*, 8–12; Jean-Luc Einaudi, *Un rêve algérien*, 83–5.

great Mokrani revolt of 1870, for example, the Beni Menaceur tribe in the eastern Dahra had raised the standard of revolt on 13 July in the market of Souk el Haad.[7] As anti-colonial movements gathered strength during the 1930s administrators became increasingly concerned to control and monitor any kind of gathering or meeting place in which Algerians, under the legitimate cover of commerce and social exchange, could pass on news and discuss politics.[8] Market day was an occasion for placing police blockades on approach roads to filter crowds of peasants arriving on foot or by mule and bicycle and to send informers into the Arab cafés to pick up intelligence.[9] Quite typical was a gendarmes report of February 1952 on a surge in nationalist activity during which an unidentified militant in an Arab café at Oued Fodda had declaimed, 'Here there will be a war as in Tunisia. We are just waiting for market day when there will be crowds of people.'[10]

For male peasants, the journey to market was the high point of the week, an occasion not only to carry out business, but also a key social occasion during which they could exchange news, catch up with friends, and throng the popular Arab cafés. The bigger and more popular the market-administrative centre, the larger the radius of its commercial catchment area and the zone of influence of news and political propaganda carried out into the interior.[11] To a considerable extent the regional map of market networks corresponded closely to the political map, since peasant commerce provided the channels through which political agents, propaganda, and news flowed.[12]

In August 1946 the sub-prefect of Miliana, the veteran administrator Jean Fendeler, expressed deep unease for any kind of social gathering that could serve as a cover for political agitation: 'For the moment an underground but ceaseless activity during Ramadan: meetings, chitchat . . . in social groups, in cafés, at the hairdressers, open until two in the morning. A period of incubation that risks finally hatching with regrettable force at the end of the fast.'[13] In 1953, on the eve of the War of Liberation, Stephanopoli Zannettaci, administrator of the CM of Cherchell, provided an overview of the subversive networks that had developed throughout the eastern Dahra between the townships and the isolated mountainous areas ('*arrière pays*'):

[7] AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, CM Cherchell, 20 February 1953.

[8] J. Fromage, 'Innovation politique', 377.

[9] M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 90.

[10] AOM 4i206, report of the commander of Orleansville gendarmerie, 7 February 1952.

[11] The geographer Nadir Boumaza, 'Rapports Ville-Campagne', provides an excellent study of the daily links between Vialar (today Tissemsilt) and the peasant communities of the southern slopes of the Ouarsenis south of Beni Hindel. Mapping road communications, bus services, movements of livestock to markets, and other data she builds up a close picture of the dynamic relationship between the urban centre and rural hinterland.

[12] J. Fromage, 'Innovation politique', maps the radius of market-centre influence in the perimeter of the towns (*haouz*) of the Constantinois.

[13] Sub-prefect of Miliana to prefect of Algiers, 14 August 1946, quoted in N. Aggoun, 'Resistance', app. 33.

> These centres, generally the location of important markets, constitute a magnet for the Berber population of the *douars* in the *commune mixte* that come there for supplies; they are also the connecting point between the mountains, the Sahel and the Mitidja. Also all these towns, that are particularly 'worked' by the political parties, serve naturally as the point of distribution into the *douars* of the *commune mixte* for the propaganda of the PCA and PPA leaders. Since 1944 the centres of Cherchell, Novi, and Gouraya have been the virulent centre for the slogans and orders that the local agents diffuse into the *douars*: it's from there that leaflets are distributed into the interior.[14]

In the small town of Duperré (Photo 2), known by contemporaries as 'little Moscow' for its militant communist cell, an unrelenting war of attrition against the local authorities, including the mayor and the CM administrator, was led continuously from 1944 to 1955 by the public scribe, Ahmed Keddar, the teacher Mohammed Embarek, and the railway postal worker, Antonin Poulet.

Ahmed Keddar, the prime scourge of the establishment, was born in about 1915 into a peasant family in the Djebel Doui massif that rose high above Duperré to the south, but his father, like so many others, was unable to subsist in the

Photo 2 Aerial view of Duperré (Ain Defla) looking south towards the Ouarsenis mountains.
Copyright Bernard Venis.

[14] AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, CM Cherchell, 20 February 1953.

mountains and moved to a *gourbis* in the peripheral slum zone of the town to work as an agricultural labourer. The move proved vital to the later career of Ahmed, and his emergence as the leading communist militant in Duperré, since it gave him access to a French education and the school-leaving certificate (CEP) that was virtually a passport for access to the lower rungs of state employment in the post office, police, railway, and colonial administration.[15]

After working as an agricultural labourer and in a vegetable processing plant Keddar's literacy stood him in good stead when he found employment from 1930 to November 1943 first in the office of a lawyer and then as interpreter and translator in a litigation office (*bureau de contentieux*), an experience that enabled him to set up business as a public scribe (*écrivain public*) in 1940. In a colonial society in which over 90 per cent of Algerian adults were illiterate the scribe played a key role in penning the personal letters sent to distant relatives serving in the armed forces or working in France and the major cities, or as an intermediary with the local administration and post office.[16] As a form of 'poor man's lawyer', the more experienced public scribes had often worked in the local administration or in law firms as clerks where they acquired a pragmatic 'insider' knowledge of the how the colonial system worked, for example in relation to the arcane mechanisms of the land laws and sequestration.[17] They knew how to formulate a demand on behalf of their clients, in a 'correct' form of address, that probed the defence works of the administrative hierarchy and, with a keen understanding of due process, forced it to investigate the complaints. The Duperré authorities, who were constantly on the receiving end of Keddar's petitions, were certainly aware of the political threat that he presented, and for a while tried to stifle his activity by withdrawing his licence as public scribe.[18]

The strategy of the Duperré communist militant was to act as the organizer and spokesman for the peasants in the surrounding countryside, co-ordinating their complaints and petitions that were delivered on market day directly to the CM office of the deputy administrator of Braz. The theatrical form of mobilization

[15] On Keddar, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire biographique*, 384; AOM 1K/402, police report to prefect of Algiers, 24 January 1950.

[16] See Bergamote Fernandez, 'L'écrivain public dans l'action sociale', *Vie sociale* 2 (2009), 121–34; article 'écrivain public', online, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89crivain_public; Annick Lacroix, 'Histoire sociale', 278–9, 662–8; B. Hadjadj, *Les voleurs*, 89–90, on his father's work as a scribe near Sétif before 1914.

[17] The political role of the public scribe in Algeria requires further historical investigation, but for the Chelif region we find, for example, that the PPA militant Benyahia Boubekeur was a scribe in the *douar* Zeddine, to the south-west of Duperré (see N. Aggoun, 'Résistance', 580); Youcef ben Mohamed Ettaieb, General Secretary of the Duperré section of the MTLD in 1948, also a public scribe, was an ex-sergeant who had previously worked for the local authority as a field guard and in the SIP: see AOM 4i206, RG report Miliana, 22 January 1948.

[18] AOM 1K/402, police report to prefect of Algiers, 24 January 1950; the licence, revoked on 3 March 1944, was restored on 5 July 1944 and Keddar continued to work as a scribe into the early 1950s.

deployed by the communists in the Chelif region closely reflected a 'modern' type of peasant demonstration that had evolved in metropolitan France during the early twentieth century, and in particular in the inter-war period. Peasant organizations in France, including the CGT after 1929, would gather in the towns, listen to orators, march in columns through the streets to the prefecture or town hall, and send delegates to deliver a petition to the authorities.[19] By the 1930s this standardized form of action, the petition-demonstration, was well recognized and, within bounds, tolerated by the prefecture as a complement to elections and democratic politics, a quasi-legal form, in which the aim of the peasants was to maximize their presence in the public space and to make their demands known to the state.

Keddar and the other communist militants in the Chelif were not mobilizing according to an 'indigenous' form of activism, but following an 'imported' model that was transmitted by the PCA and CGT through party newspapers, training schools, manuals, and militants that had worked in France. Typical of this form of protest was an instance on 7 April 1950 when a CGT delegation, composed of eleven communists, including Keddar, Embarek, and Poulet, demanded an audience with the mayor to present a petition which drew the attention of the authorities to 'the desperate and harrowing situation that deepens day by day due to the lack of employment in the region', and demanded the opening of public works programmes for the unemployed using the *djemâa* budget. Unemployment benefits, it was claimed, in line with those in metropolitan France should be introduced, along with distributions of food and clothing. The delegation marched to the town hall at the head of a demonstration that, as was usually the case, was broken up by the police.[20] Of the 163 men who signed the petition or placed their fingerprint, only twenty-six (16 per cent) came from Duperré itself, while the majority (84 per cent) inhabited the outlying rural fractions of Mergueb, Attatfa, Sadok, Feghalia, Beni Neglene, Daya, and Dahmane, an indication of the extent to which the influence of the communists was reaching into the surrounding countryside.[21] The communist street demonstrations, as with the forms of electoral campaign that we look at later, reproduced the symbolic forms, the repertoire of mobilization that had developed among the peasantry in France. However, the outward similarity of the Chelif '*manifestation-petitions*' tends to conceal the fact that the peasant activists who participated in the 'French'-style demonstrations were mobilized through, and grounded in, a very different social, familial, and community organization.

The local authorities and police did everything possible to block or ban communist meetings, refusing the hire of public halls such as the *salle de fête*,

[19] É. Lynch, *Insurrections paysannes.*
[20] AOM 1K/402, report Duperré *commissaire de police*, 8 April 1950.
[21] AOM 1K/402, communist petition to mayor, 7 April 1950.

banning public assemblies that required official permission, and arresting and prosecuting militants for minor public order infractions. Keddar, ever the lawyer, was always prepared to challenge the legality of the administration's procedure in clamping down on the constitutional rights of assembly. For example, on 22 November 1954, Ahmed Keddar led about a hundred men to the bureaux of the *commune mixte* to present a list of demands to the administrator, Escoffier. The police commissioner Cruz, accompanied by three officers, dispersed the crowd without incident, but Ahmed Keddar then led about two hundred protesters to a private plot of land belonging to the Communist Party where the police were legally powerless to intervene.[22]

The Duperré militants, by demonstrating a singular lack of fear of the mayor, CM administrator and police, helped to erode the mental chains of colonial submission that, despite the abrogation of the native code, remained singularly strong in the *douars*. By early 1950 the mayor of Duperré, Bonnet, claimed to be so demoralized by the aggressive behaviour of the communists that was sapping his authority that he threatened to resign along with the *colons* councillors. In response, the sub-prefect wrote to the Algiers prefect to recommend that order be restored in Duperré by the administrative transfer of the railway postal worker Poulet and the teacher Embarek, a move that failed.[23] Poulet put up such a strong resistance, supported by a petition and a public meeting attended by eight hundred supporters, that he became a local hero for his open defiance of the colonial regime.[24]

The authorities then proceeded to what amounted to a political trial, by bringing charges against Keddar, Poulet, and Embarek for 'insulting a Magistrate in the discharge of his duty'. The PCA, that brought in a defence lawyer from Algiers, used the opportunity to launch a public attack on the mayor, before an audience of 150 Algerians that had packed the courtroom. To the anger of the CM administrator, Escoffier, the three were given minor sentences, and

[22] AOM 4i199, report of *commissaire de police*, R. Cruz, to sub-prefect of Miliana, 22 November 1954; see also AOM 1K/402, report of Lt Tibere-Inglesse, commander of the gendarmerie section of Affreville, 11 January 1950. On 8 January 1950 the communists had used the same tactic when the police insisted on being present, claiming the gathering had been publicized as a public meeting. Antonin Poulet resisted: 'We are holding a meeting against the reactionary forces of which you are the representative.' See E. Lynch, *Insurrections paysannes*, 178–9, on peasant demonstrations in France in 1936 that in a similar way retired to 'private' land on the edge of town as a tactic to outwit police intervention.

[23] AOM 1K/402, sub-prefect of Miliana to prefect of Algiers, 24 January 1950; RG reports on Embarek, Poulet, and Keddar.

[24] AOM 1K/402, RG report on Antonin Poulet. Poulet, born in Lyon 22 September 1910, Secretary of the PCA section in Duperré, was the most active European militant. He was a thorn in the flesh of the local authorities and his police file catalogued a long list of his subversive activities, including the organization of railway strikes during which he disrupted the main-line express and goods trains at Duperré.

the day following the trial the PCA organized a mass meeting attended by 350 Algerians held on Poulet's private property at which Keddar attacked the police, the mayor, and Escoffier for trying to break the Communist Party in Duperré, and 'destroying the work to emancipate the Algerian people by undermining the prestige of the local leaders of the PCA'.[25] The attempt by the colonial authorities to contain the communist threat had backfired, and merely served to reveal their weakness while providing grist to the mill of anti-colonial rhetoric.[26]

One of the key transformations that took place in the Duperré communist cell, as in the other urban centres of the Chelif between 1944 and 1954, was the extent to which a process of 'Algerianization' took place so that Algerian militants became numerically dominant. Until the 1940s the party organization and culture had been dominated by Europeans, both in the central leadership and at local branch level by a corps of '*petits blancs*' that often retained a culture of racism and attempted to retain their ethnic-class domination over the mass of Algerian workers. With the dramatic post-Liberation surge in nationalism, many Europeans began to desert the ranks of the party. Apart from a very small number of European militants, like Antonin Poulet, the Duperré branch and its meetings after 1945 were massively dominated by Algerians.[27]

This 'Algerianization' of local branch life was significant since Arabic and Berber dialect became the dominant language in meetings, and a considerable number of peasant activists that lived close to Duperré, but outside the perimeter of colonization, were only an hour's walk from the centre and were able to participate regularly in the communist meetings, demonstrations, and social life of the party.[28] The central party apparatus in Algiers, despite a degree of 'Algerianization' remained dominated by Europeans, and by the doctrinal influence of the PCF. This may explain why the history of the PCA, that has been written primarily from the perspective and sources of the central party, has emphasized the extent to which, in opposition to the Messalist nationalists, the PCA remained adamantly opposed down to 1954 to Algerian independence and a peasant-based insurrection. The history from 'below' indicates that the centre of gravity of the Communist Party had, well before November 1954, already shifted towards a peasant revolution, which goes to explain why the rank and file in rural Algeria were able to merge so rapidly into the FLN and ALN in July 1956.

[25] AOM 1K/402, *police des renseignements généraux*, Miliana, 22 February 1950.

[26] AOM 1K/402, CM administrator CM Braz to sub-prefect of Miliana, 25 February 1950.

[27] AOM 1K/402, RG report, 22 February 1950, on a public meeting in Duperré, recorded the presence of about 350 Algerians and two Europeans, Poulet and Delpech. A resolution was passed calling for the suppression of the *caids*.

[28] A favourite communist meeting place was the café run by Madame Bensaid where the mobile cinema 'Akermi' showed propaganda films, and which the police commissioner of Duperré threatened to close: *Liberté*, 24–5 July 1947. This permeability of urban-rural socio-political life is examined in the following chapter.

Formal Petitions to the Algiers Government

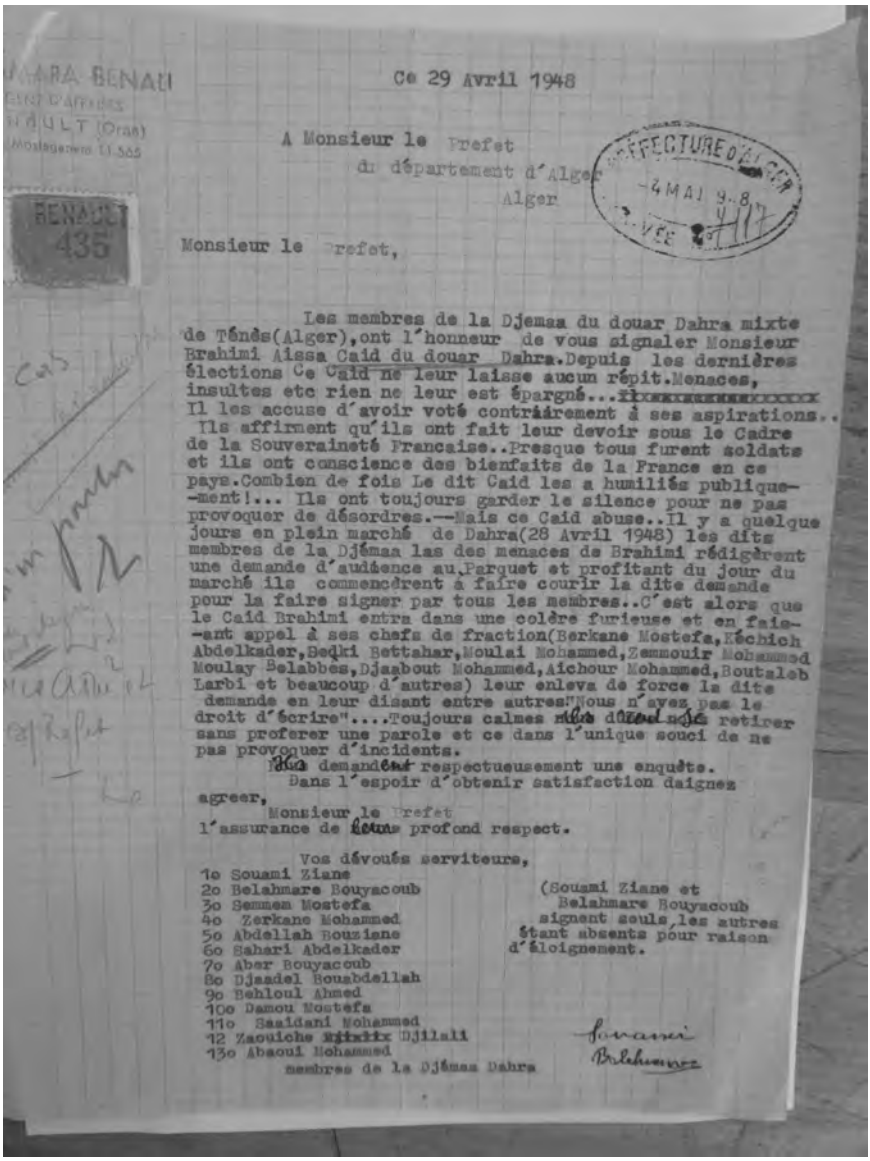
A considerable volume of petitions in the Chelif was delivered, not only directly by delegations arriving at the door of the local administration, backed up by massed demonstrators, but were sent by post to the higher levels of central government, usually the prefect of Algiers and the Governor General himself. The famine conditions of 1944 to 1945 precipitated extreme tension among peasants who were not only dependent on grain distribution for survival, but also, without seed reserves, were dependent on the SIP and state assistance for loans, the release of seed-grain, and the restocking of sheep, goat, and cattle. A flood of petitions was mainly concerned with this explosive issue, accusations made by peasants that the *caids* were systematically involved in the fraudulent distribution of cereals and other rationed materials like cloth and petrol that favoured their own relatives or clients, or were engaged in the illegal storage of grain and black-market racketeering.[29]

But one of the problems faced by individual peasants in having recourse to a formal complaint or petition procedure was that this exposed them to the counter-violence of the *caid* and his men, and the archive contains numerous reports of plaintiffs being publicly insulted or assaulted, subjected to police harassment, or discriminated against in the distribution of vital rations and employment in public works. Almost all the movements of resistance to the *caids* and his agents were mounted by groups, often working through the structure of the *djemâa*, that offered a degree of collective protection. For example, the public scribe Benali Omara drew up a petition to the prefect of Algiers on behalf of the *djemâa* of the *douar* Dahra, signed by thirteen men on 29 April 1948 (see Photo 3).

This demanded an investigation of the *caid* Aissa Brahimi who had constantly and publicly sought to insult and humiliate members of the *djemâa* for voting against his wishes and, in a rage, had ordered his fraction headmen in the marketplace to seize another draft petition requesting a hearing from a judge. Clearly even opposition groups were vulnerable to violent abuse by the *caids*, and this is why they sought assistance both from public scribes, as well as protection from PCA militants and, after 1944, from the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs.*

Marcel Montagné, for example, head of the communist branch in Orleansville, had insisted on a meeting with the prefect of Algiers in December 1944, to lodge complaints against three *caids*. The *caid* Ziane of the *douar* M'Chaia had demanded bribes ('*bakhchiche*') for the distribution of ration cards, while forty

[29] AOM 91/1K163, cabinet papers of the prefect of Algiers (1941–8), provides a very rich box file relating to peasant petitions, and administrative investigations, for the Chelif region and the area of Aumale, Palestro, and Bou Saada.



Ce 29 Avril 1948

A Monsieur le Prefet
du département d'Alger
Alger

Monsieur le Prefet,

Les membres de la Djemaa du douar Dahra mixte de Ténès(Alger),ont l'honneur de vous signaler Monsieur Brahimi Aissa Caid du douar Dahra.Depuis les dernières élections Ce Caid ne leur laisse aucun répit.Menaces, insultes etc rien ne leur est épargné... Il les accuse d'avoir voté contrairement à ses aspirations.. Ils affirment qu'ils ont fait leur devoir sous le Cadre de la Souveraineté Francaise..Presque tous furent soldats et ils ont conscience des bienfaits de la France en ce pays.Combien de fois Le dit Caid les a humiliés publique--ment!... Ils ont toujours garder le silence pour ne pas provoquer de désordres.--Mais ce Caid abuse..Il y a quelque jours en plein marché de Dahra(28 Avril 1948) les dits membres de la Djémaa las des menaces de Brahimi rédigèrent une demande d'audience au,Parquet et profitant du jour du marché ils commencèrent à faire courir la dite demande pour la faire signer par tous les membres..C'est alors que le Caid Brahimi entra dans une colère furieuse et en faie--ant appel à ses chefs de fraction(Berkane Mostefa,Kéchich Abdelkader,Bedki Bettahar,Moulai Mohammed,Zemmouir Mohammed Moulay Belabbes,Djaabout Mohammed,Aichour Mohammed,Boutaleb Larbi et beaucoup d'autres) leur enleva de force la dite demande en leur disant entre autres"Vous n'avez pas le droit d'écrire"....Toujours calmes ils durent se retirer sans proferer une parole et ce dans l'unique souci de ne pas provoquer d'incidents.

Ils demandent respectueusement une enquête.

Dans l'espoir d'obtenir satisfaction daignez agreer,

Monsieur le Prefet
l'assurance de leur profond respect.

Vos dévoués serviteurs,

1o Sousmi Ziane
2o Belahmare Bouyacoub
3o Semmem Mostefa
4o Zerkane Mohammed
5o Abdellah Bouziane
6o Bahari Abdelkader
7o Aber Bouyacoub
8o Djaadel Bouabdellah
9o Behloul Ahmed
10o Damou Mostefa
11o Saaidani Mohammed
12 Zaouiche Djilali
13o Abaoui Mohammed
membres de la Djémaa Dahra

(Sousmi Ziane et Belahmare Bouyacoub signent seuls,les autres étant absents pour raison d'éloignement.

Photo 3 A petition of the *djemâa*, *douar* Dahra, to the prefect of Algiers, 29 April 1948. This formal document had been typed by a public scribe.
Copyright AOM.

peasants of the *douar* Sly had accused the *caid* Moktar Moktari also of fraud relating to ration cards, and in revenge he had horse-whipped ('*cravachés*') the plaintiffs in the presence of the gendarmes. The *caid* Moudjebeur of the *douar* Ouled Ziane was trafficking rationed cloth, and had paid workmen in this way for

building his house.[30] The communist tactic of 'going to the top' enabled them to go over the heads of the local CM administrators, police, and sub-prefects, who tended to ignore or bury any complaints they received. Moreover, militant public scribes and lawyers were perfectly aware of the formal legal and institutional requirements in relation to petitions, and the Algiers government invariably responded by setting in motion an official investigation.[31] A key function of the new *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* established from early 1944 onwards was to encourage local delegates living in the interior to keep Mohammed Badsi, the Federal Secretary in Algiers, informed of any issues arising so that he could co-ordinate support by writing to the Algiers government to demand an official enquiry or by contacting senior communist politicians to give added weight and publicity to any protest.[32] However, this did not prevent activists in the SPC coming under intense, and often violent, pressure from the *caids*, as in the case of the delegate Abdelkader Ammari of the *douar* Heumis (CM Ténès) who, after being savagely beaten by the *caid* and a henchman, fled to Algiers for safety.[33]

The substantial archive files on the official investigation of complaints against the *caids* reveal a standard procedure as orders passed down the administrative hierarchy from Algiers to the sub-prefect in Orleansville or Miliana, then to the CM administrator who, after an enquiry that might involve interviews with the *caid* and the plaintiffs, sent a full report back up the administrative ladder.[34] A typical example concerns the dossier on Mohammed ben Brahim Mazouza, president of the *djemâa* of the *douar* Louroud, who wrote from Duperré on 8 August 1946 to the prefect of Algiers, demanding an enquiry into the actions of the *caid* Bessekri whom he accused of grossly insulting him in front of numerous witnesses and failing to show any respect for the elected representative of the people.[35] It took six months for the grinding procedure to be completed, and the considerable volume of correspondence in this and in other cases gives the

[30] AOM 91/1K163, prefect of Algiers to Secretary General *Affaires musulmanes*, 28 December 1944.

[31] In many states, including France since 1789, there existed a constitutional right to petition, and in the case of colonial Algeria this may help to explain the otherwise puzzling fact that peasants, through the intermediary of the scribe, were able to demand serious attention from the upper echelons of the Algiers government. Many thousands of petitions were received each year from Algeria by the *Commission de petition* of the Paris National Assembly that complained in 1886 of an avalanche of paper, of demands and requests of every kind, for which it blamed the public scribes who abused the credulity of simple natives and lured them by false promises; see *Feuilletons (Chambre des députés)*, 6 June 1886, 24–7, petition no. 2066.

[32] AOM 4i209 has a typed copy of a letter intercepted in the post, from an unknown SPC delegate in Teniet el Haad, to Mohammed Badsi, 20 November 1945. This details a wave of protest by peasants against various *caids* for prioritizing their brothers, sons, brother-in-law, and others in the distribution of seed-grain.

[33] AOM 91/1K163, letter from Badsi, general secretary of the SPC, Algiers, to prefect of Algiers 16 November 1945.

[34] This cumbersome procedure, that has left a large paper trail in the numerous dossiers, could take months to complete.

[35] AOM 91/1K163, Mazouza to Algiers prefect, 8 August 1946.

impression of a colonial administration that, following a professional code of conduct, treated complaints from the peasantry with the utmost care. But formal correctness barely concealed a routine bias that invariably found in favour of the *caids* and sought to discredit or undermine the claims and evidence presented by anti-colonial groups. In most instances local investigations were carried out by the CM administrator, *caids*, and police, who closed ranks, intimidated plaintiffs, and usually persuaded Algiers to shelve the affair.

Invariably an accused *caid* was reported back as a man of exemplary good behaviour, a loyal servant of France, who was the victim of a political cabal engineered by those who aimed to damage the good name of the administrators and, through them, of France itself. The *caid*, it was claimed, was the object of a local power struggle, a *çof*, in which one family or clan, often portrayed as harbouring a wish for revenge after losing out in the struggle for office, was seeking to oust and then replace their opponents with one of their own candidates.[36] Some CM administrators, like the highly conservative H. Gauthier of Teniet el Haad, made it clear that official admission of any wrongdoing by a *caid* was dangerous since it could undermine the faith of the simple peasant in his colonial superiors. Local administrators and *caids* frequently informed the Algiers government of the dangers of falling for the cunning ruses of the opposition, elaborate deceptions that could only damage the morale of them and other loyal agents. The systematic defense of incompetent and violent *caids* reinforced the deepening alienation of the peasantry from the colonial regime and drove many into the arms of the nationalist and communist movements.

However, in the most serious cases of *caidal* abuse, where there was the very real danger of the administration losing control of whole swathes of countryside, and suffering real political damage in the press and national assembly, the Algiers government was prepared to take more vigorous action by sending a senior inspector to investigate. One such investigation, that of the *caid* Mohammed Zemouli, is looked at more closely since it provides a particularly detailed insight into the way in which a weak, incompetent, and predatory *caid* could bring about a virtual collapse of authority in an isolated mountain community.

Mohammed ben Djilali Zemouli, born in 1881, was able, despite his unsavoury character and a six-month prison sentence in 1902, to bribe his way into his appointment as *caid* of Bou Medfa in 1923. The sub-prefet of Miliana described him in 1934 as 'intelligent and active, but ignorant, without scruple, of a detestable private conduct, profoundly despised', and as the cause of 'a veritable scandal in native circles'.[37] He was constantly absent from his *douar*, the subject of endless

[36] AOM 91/1K163, RG Inspector Bertocchi to sub-prefect of Aumale, 13 June 1946, relating to a complaint brought by the communists against a *caid*, the *agha* Brahim Mahieddine. This was interpreted as the work of his cousin, Youcef ben Mahieddine, president of the SPC branch, who was bitter at losing his position as head of the *djemâa* in an election won by the son of the *agha*.

[37] AOM 4i197, sub-prefect letter, 12 April 1934.

complaints 'for abusive behaviour, violence and embezzlement', and was forced eventually to flee the area because of the hostility of the inhabitants.

The administration, instead of seizing the opportunity to remove the delinquent *caid*, simply transferred him in 1934 to the *douar* of Chenoua, a mountainous peninsular to the north of Cherchell. Here, like many other absentee *caids*, he chose to reside in the more comfortable surroundings of the town of Cherchell rather than in the interior of the Chenoua massif. As a consequence he lacked the daily contact with the population that was crucial to the system of close supervision and indirect rule. Although Zemouli was suspended for a while between 1935 to 1937 he was once again reinstated. By early 1940 the police and the prefecture of Algiers, concerned by a serious breakdown of law and order in the isolated massif, carried out a detailed investigation of the failings of Mohammed Zemouli.

The mountainous peninsular of the Chenoua presented, on a smaller scale, many of the geographical and administrative features of the isolated, karst uplands of the Ouarsenis and Dahra.[38] A police investigation of the crisis in the Chenoua reported that this 'small mountainous massif that is not penetrated by any lines of communication', was inhabited by a backward, Berber-speaking population of 12,000 people. The local authorities of Cherchell and Tipaza had absorbed the area into the CPE, simply to be able to add their taxes to the municipal budget, but without any reciprocal expenditure on the mountain peasantry, 'more or less abandoned to themselves'.[39] The *caid* constantly resisted official pressure to live in the *douar*, and since he did not speak Berber and lacked daily contact, he could not fulfil his basic administrative and intelligence functions. The Cherchell commissioner of police reported that the *douar* 'avoided in practice all surveillance' and it was 'almost impossible to know what goes on there, to be rapidly and effectively informed in the event of serious matters such as murder, family vendettas, serious theft, and fires'.

In the absence of any state authority the whole massif had deteriorated into a situation of lawlessness. In recent years there had been several murders that it had been difficult to investigate because of the inhabitants 'law of silence'. In 1937 a thousand kilos of explosives and 3,000 detonators had been stolen during construction of a water pipeline and was being used to fish off the Chenoua coast. Thefts had been carried out in the resort hotels at Chenoua Plage and an informant reported insignia embroided bed linen in a *mechta*. At night the Chenoua had become a virtual no-go zone and *colons*, and even the three field guards, dare not venture out, 'since many natives go armed and do not hesitate to

[38] Xavier de Planhol, 'Les nouveaux villages de l'Atlas Blidéen du Chenoua et de la Mitidja Occidentale', *Revue africaine* 104 (1960), 229–82, and 105 (1961), 5–48, provides a good background to the geography of the massif and its dispersed farmhouses; see also Philippe Leveau, 'Le Chénoua: de la colonisation au village de regroupement (la prolétarisation d'une communauté montagnarde d'Algérie)', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 19.1 (1975), 101–12.

[39] AOM 4i197, report of the *Chef de bataillon* of the CIE to the prefect of Algiers, 23 March 1940.

attack passers-by if some profit can be made'. The commissioner recommended a combined operation by the gendarmerie and municipal police of Cherchell, along with a *brigade mobile*, to carry out a sweep and search operation to arrest criminal suspects and army deserters, and locate illegal arms and ammunition.[40]

The prefecture responded by sending a captain of the *Centre d'information et d'étude* (CIE) to investigate the *caid* and he reported that Zemouli was indeed detested by the population that named him the 'Jackal', since he extorted money for his services (*bakhchiche*), and had 'seriously fleeced (*plumé*) those he administered'. Although Zemouli, the father of many children, was on a low salary of 13,000 francs, he had somehow found the capital of 90,000 francs to buy and restore a house. The captain concluded, 'His removal can only have the best effect'.[41]

The Zemouli case is indicative of the general concern of the authorities regarding the surveillance of isolated mountain zones. In the Chenoua, noted the police, 'As in all geographically steep and rough terrain, surveillance is difficult, if not ineffective'. The population lived in considerable poverty, since 'the soil is poor and practically uncultivable on the rocky massifs', and the authorities of Cherchell had virtually abandoned the area to its own devices. The isolation of the massif was further compounded by the *colons*' fear of banditry and, 'the detestable reputation of the people of the *douar* who are accused of living from plunder (poaching or fishing with explosives), theft and receiving goods'. It was the prime responsibility of the *caid* to prevent such a situation developing, but Zemouli, 'the Jackal', was an absentee, did not speak the dialect of the inhabitants, and had clearly lost any authority he might have had among the tough mountain people: 'It is widely said that he cannot travel about in the *douar* without being shot at.'

The Zemouli case throws light on the fragile hold of the colonial administration over the mountainous zones in general and the potential for a serious breakdown in regulation and intelligence where the *caids* were incompetent or corrupt. After 1954 the Chenoua peasants gravitated rapidly into the communist and FLN maquis and support networks.[42] The colonial administration made little attempt to rectify the situation until the War of Independence was underway through the introduction of the SAS and the 1956 reform in local government, but by then the guerrilla forces had taken full advantage of the power vacuum in the mountains to create and stabilize their own maquis networks.

The failure of the authorities to remove Zemouli, who was so conspicuously unable to carry out his duties, far from being exceptional was typical of the

[40] AOM 4i197, report of Cherchell Commissioner to prefect, 18 March 1940.

[41] AOM 4i197, CIE, Algiers, 12 August 1940, '*Notes de tournée*'. The dossier does not indicate if Zemouli was removed from office.

[42] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Aux origines*, 349–53; in June 1945 the PPA planned an insurrection in the military academy of Cherchell and investigated plans for a maquis in the adjacent Chenoua. On the Chenoua as a major centre of subsequent ALN guerrilla activity that was subjected to mass *regroupements*, see X. de Planhol, 'Les nouveaux villages'.

practice of the colonial government.[43] On rare occasions Algiers might remove a rogue *caid*, or in less serious instances place a reprimand ('*blame*') on his personnel file, but the most widespread practice was to transfer the *caid* to another location. This was the standard solution sought whenever there was a build-up of popular anger and resentment towards the malpractice of a *caid*, when tensions threatened good order and posed a headache for local administrators. Such a punitive transfer of a *caid* constituted a form of 'exile' away from his home area, a disciplinary process that calculated the level of punishment according to distance, and the poverty and isolation of the *douar*. Most *caids* were well established in their region of birth, where they held land and had a dense social and familial network, so to be cast into a distant *douar* presented a considerable punishment.[44]

The transfer of rogue or ineffective *caids* to another *douar*, as in the case of Zemouli, simply ensured that the same problems of corrupt or failing practice were transferred elsewhere. The *djemâa* of Oulad Sidi Brahim in a petition to the prefect in August 1947 opposed the transfer back into their *douar* of Mohamed Tayeb ben Nadir Nadir, who had been first removed from them as *caid* in the late 1920s. The petitioners catalogued in detail the depredations of this *caid* over the following twenty years, his criminal acts and prison sentences, and his extraordinary reappointment to a succession of seven *douars*, where he created such hostility among the peasantry that he was, in one instance, driven away after a severe beating by the inhabitants, and in another, 'the people of his *douar* have sworn to kill him if he returns'.[45]

However, as anti-nationalist repression in the countryside deepened under Naegelen in 1948 the administration was fully prepared to systematically weed out or punish *caids* that had not sufficiently countered the PPA in the electoral campaign for the newly formed Algerian Assembly. The administrator of the CM of Bou Saada recommended that two *caids*, who had failed to act effectively against the Messalists, should be moved, since 'the transfer elsewhere of these two native chiefs would, in the interests of the service, have a salutary effect on the future behaviour of our *caids* and bring a legitimate satisfaction to those of our agents that have courageously battled against the separatists'.[46] In this strange system little thought seems to have been given to the fact that movement of

[43] C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens*, 1.199, 2.631, under a circular of 1885 prefects no longer had the power to remove *caids*; I was unable to establish if this policy was still in place by the 1940s.

[44] AOM 91/1K163, dossier on Benouard Guelmane, *caid* of the *douar* Oued Djer, removed for extortion of the peasants and posted to the *douar* Sebkha (CM Maillot). By February 1948 Guelmane was seeking a return to Oued Djer since, he claimed, as an 'Arab' placed in a Kabyle region and not speaking Berber, he was unable to carry out his duties. He was also separated from his family since he had been unable to find lodgings at Sebkha. Another *caid* requested in May 1948 to be posted back to his home area, as 'my family remains alone in my former *douar* without support or head, my young children without education; my fields abandoned and many other problems'.

[45] AOM 91/1K163, petition of *djemâa* Oulad Sidi Brahim to prefect of Algiers, 20 August 1947.

[46] AOM 91/1K163, administrator CM Bou Saada, 14 May 1949, to prefect of Algiers.

delinquent, corrupt, or incompetent *caids*, or those that were sympathetic to the nationalists, might simply transfer the problem to another area.

Ageron remarks that down to 1900 the golden rule of the department of native affairs in managing the *caidat* was to ensure that they were appointed, as far as was possible, from their place of origin so that they had a good knowledge of the society, its dialect, and clan system.[47] However, after the First World War, government oversight of the CM system became increasingly confused and inconsistent. Some attempts were made to train and promote *caids* as a professional class of functionaries, servants of the state that could be separated from the corrupting influence of family and clientele networks by circulating them through distant *douars* and not allowing them to put down local roots. However, the extension of the *grandes familles* coalitions meant that powerful politicians like the Saiah and Bentaieb were increasingly able to lobby to ensure that sons and nephews were appointed to both the richest *douars*, those near the plain, and to where the extended family already owned agricultural and commercial interests. The latter worked towards the reinforcement of patrimonialism and senior administrators, in appointing *caids*, frequently justified their choice by the degree to which a candidate could ensure strong and effective control of the peasantry because of his wealth and traditional religious or 'tribal' allegiance. In general the *grandes familles* monopolized the most desirable *douars* close to the rich plains and townships, while the most isolated and impoverished *douars* high in the mountainous interior went to a lower class of poorly educated recruits, usually retired soldiers and field guards.[48] This was precisely the zone in which the guerrilla forces would find a base.

It can be noted that the inhabitants of a *douar* were, in general, hostile to the appointment of a *caid* from outside the community, perhaps because such a 'foreigner' was quite likely to be a delinquent transferred from another *douar*, or because he was less likely to be open to manipulation by family clans and more ruthless in his exploitation of the peasants.[49] The conventional history of the *caids* lays emphasis on the brutal authority with which they imposed their will, but this ignores the extent to which peasants were perfectly capable of subjecting a *caid* who was not to their liking to the formidable united front of the community that could refuse to cooperate, socially isolate, or threaten the *caid* and virtually send

[47] C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens*, 2.633.

[48] AOM 91/1K163, note of prefect of Algiers to *Affaires musulmanes* 8 January 1945: the *bachaga* Belkacem Gerhat protested that a transfer of his nephew as *caid* in Boghari, where the clan interest was based, so damaged the honour of the family that he was prepared to resign as *caid*.

[49] M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 14, remarks that the purpose of his conservative, land-holding family in the inter-war period was to agitate for a *caid* that could best guarantee keeping the colonial administration at arms length; likewise Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 127, states that his father would only accept a *caid* post on condition that the notables backed him in keeping the inner affairs of the *douar* secret from the administration.

him to Coventry.[50] In reality many *caids* found themselves in a position in which they were dependent on the fraction headmen in the management of the *douar*, so that de facto power-sharing came about through forms of negotiation or tacit agreement. *Caids* rarely lived in the interior, but resided in the plain or in urban centres, and these 'absentees' seem to have been happy to leave fractions to their own devices as long as they remained quiet, paid their taxes, and did not cause him problems with the CM administration, a pact that suited the peasantry that preferred to manage their own affairs beyond the eye of the state.[51] One long-term consequence was that on the first arrival of guerrilla forces in the mountains all intelligence immediately dried up and administrators admitted that they had lost any meaningful control over the rural population.

[50] AOM 91/1K163, petition of *djemâa* of *douar* Bahata, 19 January 1948 to the Algiers prefect, in opposing the appointment of Said Loualiche as field guard, details an extraordinary and enduring hatred of the inhabitants against the Loualiche family, beginning with his grandfather, assassinated by gunshot 23 April 1902, and of his uncle, wounded by gunshot on 18 April 1906.

[51] For an excellent insight into how such a pact between *caid* and the *douar* peasants operated, see B. Hadjadj, *Les voleurs de rêves*, 103–5, 123, 213–15, on his father, Brahim, *caid* in the Sétif region between 1920 and the 1940s.

9
The Battle for the *douars* and the *djemâa* Elections of 1947

From 1943 onwards the communists and Messalists, based mainly in the townships of the Chelif region, engaged in a propaganda campaign that was aimed primarily at peasants as they came into the towns on market day, but parallel to this more 'conventional' style of urban politics the anti-colonial movements began to join forces directly with radical peasant cells that were beginning to develop in the *douars*. This development is of particular importance to our understanding of the rural roots of the Algerian War of Independence since it was here that we find communities entering into a new type or phase of political activism that was to provide the cadres and organizational experience that proved vital to the launch of the first guerrilla forces. The process of radicalization was significantly shaped or channeled through the *djemâa* elections of 1945 and 1947, which provided the opportunity for a political fulcrum, a counter-lever to the *caids*, that would enable peasants to take control of their own communes.

The peasant leaders during the late 1940s set about creating new forms of contestation not through riot and armed revolt, but through a radical reading or interpretation of the existing laws and regulations on the formal powers of the *caids* and *djemâas*. On 29 August 1945 the Minister of the Interior, Tixier, issued a decree that set out to reinvigorate and extend the functions of the *djemâa*, in line with the project for commune reform, which considerably reinforced the power of the president and elected delegates.[1] Among the long list of legal powers held by the *djemâa* was the right to raise local taxes, to manage the budget and expenditure on local infrastructures, from roads and water supplies to schools and medical centres. The *djemâa*, and this was to prove very significant, controlled the communal lands and forests, settled matters of access to grazing, and oversaw the conditions under which village lands could be rented, fruits such as figs and olives harvested and divided up, and licences agreed for commercial mining or quarrying. The *djemâa* also had a key part to play in the politically sensitive issue of emergency relief, and the distribution of cereals and rationed goods such as clothing and petrol. Although the sub-prefect and prefect retained the power to

[1] The official publication *Documents algériens—historique et réforme: politique musulmane* 2 (1945), 15, described the decree of 29 August as completing the long 'evolution' towards municipal government, 'the last stage before integral autonomy'.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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veto the more important *djemâa* decisions, the legal framework still gave the *djemâa* considerable leverage to contest *caid* and *colons* authority and the more militant *djemâas* began to forge ahead and to act like autonomous bodies in which the *caids* were increasingly excluded from any decision-making.

Since the boundary between the relative powers of *caids* and *djemâas* often remained in practice vague or ambiguous, a battle of attrition ensued for local domination. The *caids* and their associates, the field guards, *khodjars*, and cavalrymen, could not stand for election to the *djemâa*, allowing the latter to stand as a political counterweight to the *caids*, one that both crystallized out opposition forces and, at the same time, claimed the democratic legitimacy of a popular mandate, unlike their opponents who were derided as the placemen and creatures of the colonial regime. That the peasant leaders proved highly skilful in defending their actions by reference to a technical body of legislation was made possible through the influence of the SPC and CGT unions, the communist press, and the fact that numerous militants had, or continued, to find employment within the bureaucracy of the CMs and town halls, and had an 'insider' knowledge of administrative law as well as of the current debate on communal reform that would involve abolition of the *caid* system.[2]

As we have seen (Chapter 6) the 1919 Jonnart Law had major, long-term implications for the rise of nationalism in that it greatly extended the franchise in rural society and empowered *djemâas*, under the leadership of the president, to enter into opposition to the local colonial administration. However, there was one further technical effect of the act, one that has escaped the notice of historians, which was to have major consequences for the rapid extension of party politics into the interior. The Jonnart Law created a system of voting by party lists so that the number of *djemâa* members to be elected varied, on a sliding scale, according to the size of the *douar* population. This meant that each 'party' or group contesting an election printed in advance its own ballot paper on which there might be up to twenty candidates listed by name, and voters would be invited to select one ballot from those on display and to fold it into a small envelope that was slotted into the urn. This system meant that the selection of *djemâa* delegates largely escaped the control of the *caids*, since a would-be president or leading activist could recruit candidates for his list from anywhere within the bounds of the *douar*, including among the party militants of his cell or network that might be concentrated in just one or two fractions. The *caids* tried to counter this by exercising an ever firmer control over the appointment and policing of the headmen, each of which came from a different fraction. One sign of the deepening

[2] For example, the PPA militant Mohammed Maroc, the son of a miner in the *douar* Rouina, was employed in the CM of Braz at Duperré until sacked in 1946; it was not entirely a coincidence that Ahmed Keddar tabled a motion in the Duperré municipal council on 29 August 1945 to suppress the post of *caid*, the same day on which the decree extended the *djemâa* powers.

political divisions within the *douar* came during the acrimonious, and often violent, elections when *caids* tried to rally the armed *kebirs*, members of their clientele network, in any direct confrontation with the *djemâa* militants recruited on the party list.

During the inter-war period, and down to the end of the Vichy government, each *djemâa* could, in theory, place a demand for investment in rural infrastructures through their president who was a member of the *commission municipale* of the CM, a body chaired by the administrator composed of European members that sat alongside a large body of *caids* and *djemâa* presidents from each *douar*.[3] In reality, as Claude Collot, remarks, the 'fake' municipal council was 'an instrument for the subjection of the Muslim population', and the *djemâas* stood little chance of gaining a hearing for their demands, unless they happened to coincide with the interests of the *colons* and the administration.[4] However, the deliberations of the *djemâas* of the CM of Braz during early 1946 show a new burst of energy in which each *douar* began to forward petitions directly to the CM administrator, not via the commission, making demands for investment.

The petitions and letters provide an insight into the key priorities of the peasants, the most urgent issues facing the impoverished communities, and how they hoped to see things improved in the future.[5] A diverse range of themes were mentioned, among them repair or extension of water supplies from springs and wells; road construction, in particular as a form of public works to assist the unemployed; building of both Koranic and French and Arab language schools; free maternity care for mothers and babies; construction of shelters for visiting medical teams; creation of local markets; restoration of livestock herds decimated by drought and access to forest grazing; and a better form of distribution of cereals and rationed goods that would achieve equity between urban and rural areas.

These demands, while not revolutionary, are indicative of a growing impatience in the *douars* at the failure of the CM system to address their needs, and a growing sense of entitlement, an expectation that the post-Liberation colonial government should improve the economy and welfare rights of the peasantry. The message of the PCA, in contesting the elections of 1945 in several *douars*, was to demonstrate that the *djemâa* could often marginalize the *caids* and seize the initiative to carry out its own autonomous management of community affairs.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two parts. First we look at the way in which the communists began to expand their activities outwards from the urban and mining centres into the neighbouring *douars* by focusing on four localities, the *douar* of Bouzehar, on the southern margins of the Duperré, the *douars* of

[3] AOM 91/1K22, minutes of the *commission municipale* for the CM Chelif, 3 April 1937, indicate that it was composed of some fifty-nine members, including fourteen Europeans and a *caid* and *djemâa* president for each *douar*.

[4] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 112–14.

[5] AOM 91301/61, minutes of *djemâa* meetings and demands to CM of Braz 1946.

Beni Ghomeriane and El Aneb immediately to the north of the town, the *douars* of Taouira and Beni Haouz in the mountains to the east of Ténès, and the area around Cherchell in the north-east. The second part looks at the crucial *djemâa* elections of late 1947, which marked a decisive watershed in the battle between the nationalists and the phase of repression led by Naegelen after 1948.

The Communist Cell in the *douar* Bouzehar

In 1857 the Duperré municipality expanded its boundary to incorporate by *rattachement* the *douar* of Bouzehar in order to increase *colons* control of Algerian taxes and land, including 404 hectares of communal arable and forest grazing, an intrusion that was to play a major part in the communist-led resistance movement from 1944 onwards.[6] Although Bouzehar was part of the municipality (CPE) of Duperré, it retained its identity as a *douar*, along with an elected *djemâa*.[7] This meant that the four thousand peasants in Bouzehar, although officially part of Duperré, provided the *colons* with a reservoir of labour and shared the features of the impoverished populations found further out in the *communes mixtes* of the piedmont.[8]

In the immediate post-Liberation period the French Communist Party, at the time the largest in France, enjoyed widespread popular prestige and considerable authority because of its role in the Resistance, while it also shared office as part of the coalition tripartite government. The majority of conservative *colons* politicians in Algeria had worked closely with the Vichy regime and, at least in the short term, were inclined to keep their head down until the trials for collaboration were over. The high level of prestige enjoyed by the communists, before the Cold War began to bite, helps explain in part why the militants in the Chelif felt so confident in pushing home their campaign against the local conservatives as ex-collaborators. In September 1945 the Duperré communists contested and won nine *djemâa* elections in the CM of Braz under the banner of the *Union démocratique et anti-fasciste*.

On 29 July 1945 the communists Ahmed Keddar and Mohammed Sadout were elected to the Duperré municipal council and immediately launched a campaign to remove the *caid* of the *douar* of Bouzehar, Abdelkader Rezkallah.[9] The communists accused both the mayor, Bonnet, and the *caid* of acting as collaborators under Vichy who had brought about the imprisonment of various individuals so

[6] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.178, table 5; 239, table 15.

[7] On the anomalous position of the *douar-djemâas* located inside the CPE, as opposed to the *communes mixtes*, see C. Collot, *Institutions*, 120–1.

[8] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.304–6, in 1950 of 520 Algerian farmers in the CPE of Duperré, 416 (80 per cent) worked under 5 hectares of land, although 10 hectares was the minimum required for the subsistence of a family. Of these 142 still used the primitive wooden plough, and fifty-five a light iron plough.

[9] AOM 1K/402, note on Ahmed Keddar, 24 January 1950.

they could seize their land or livestock. On 29 August 1945 Keddar and Sadout tabled a motion in the municipal council that demanded the suppression of the post of *caid* held by Rezkallah. This was voted out by the European councillors, who held an automatic majority, but the resolution was soon adopted by the communist-led *djemâa* of Bouzehar that had been newly elected on 16 September 1945.[10]

The president of the *djemâa*, Mohamed ben Mohamed Chérifi, known as 'Bouras', born in the fraction of Dahmane of Bouzehar in 1892, was a communist militant, who was later to head an ALN guerrilla group.[11] The Bouzehar *djemâa* demanded the suppression of the *caid* on the grounds that the post was entirely superfluous and an unnecessary cost. Rezkallah was also accused of extensive fraudulent practices in the distribution of rationed foodstuffs, seed-grain, and textiles, an explosive issue following the recent famine of 1944–5.

But most radical of all was the attempt by the PCA to refer back to the legal founding text of the *djemâa*, the Jonnart Law of 6 February 1919, and its recent revision by the decree of 29 August 1945, to recover and reassert powers that had been, it was claimed, mis-appropriated by the *caids* and the *colons*. The legislation gave the *djemâa* not inconsiderable powers to micro-manage aspects of *douar* life that were of much importance to the peasant community and its economic well-being.

The Bouzehar communal lands represented a significant resource and would have been much sought after by desperate peasants, 80 per cent of whom had access to tiny, fragmented holdings of under 5 hectares. The *djemâa* president Mohamed Chérifi urgently sought to suspend a decision of the outgoing *djemâa* to rent communal lands to sixteen individuals, clients or kin of the *caid* and his associates. There was a particularly acrimonious dispute over control of 172 hectares of communal forest, especially after the mayor had ordered the harvesting of olive trees in November 1945.[12] After a survey, the *djemâa* set out to redistribute communal lands to the most needy, both for cultivation and for the construction of *gourbis*.[13]

The communist control of the *djemâa* of Bouzehar from 1945 to 1950[14] enabled the PCA to carry out its programme, which Ahmed Keddar defined as the

[10] AOM 1K/186, minutes of the *djemâa* Bouzehar, 28 September 1945. In the December 1947 *djemâa* elections the PCA list held the seat with 345 votes, against the pro-French 'Independents' with 215, and the MTLD with 118.

[11] AOM 4SAS105, report 2e Bureau, Orleansville, 3 December 1957. The sub-prefect of Miliana claimed in 1950 that all twelve members of the *djemâa* were illiterate, apart from its secretary Ahmed Hadj.

[12] AOM 1K/186, minutes of *djemâa* Bouzehar, 26 November 1945.

[13] AOM 1K/186, minutes of *djemâa* Bouzehar, 23 October 1945. X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.307, indicates that the Duperré communal lands consisted of 404 hectares, a larger than average holding for the Chelif.

[14] AOM 1K/402, sub-prefect of Miliana to prefect of Algiers, 24 January 1950. *Liberté*, 18 June 1953, detailed the achievements of the communist-led *djemâa* between 1945 until its forced dissolution in 1950, including redistribution of 30 hectares of commons to peasants in the fraction Ghebai Dahmane, 30 hectares in Attatfa, and 30 hectares in Daya, and redistribution of 241 hectares of forest. Also demanded was access for grazing in the mountainous Djebel Doui, tax relief for large, indigent families, free hospital treatment for the needy, education for all children, and free clothing for the poor pupils.

distribution of communes to landless peasants, the reconstruction of the school in the fraction Dahmane, the supply of water to the fraction Attatfa, where the inhabitants had to walk 3 kilometres to a spring, the urgent provision of seed-grain, and the closure and conversion of the brothel ('*maison de débauche*') into a dispensary.[15] As Keddar later boasted it was the PCA that, 'undertook to dig the wells, repair the roads, and proceeded to an equitable sharing of the land'.[16] The Duperré communists had begun to demonstrate to the peasants of Bouzehar how electoral control of the *djemâa* had achieved very real material changes for the poor community, improvements of a kind that had remained long blocked under the previous CM system.

After the Second World War the Algerian Communist Party, historians have often noted, was far more effective in promoting what may be described as syndicalist or social welfare demands of this kind rather than the message of national liberation that was central to the Messalist movement. However, hungry peasants may have been as much drawn to the PCA by the concrete benefits that were extracted in the face of the local administration, as by promises of nebulous, future ideological gains such as 'freedom' and 'democracy'.

Kouider Smail: The Communists in the *douars* El Ghorine and El Aneb

As Keddar and the Duperré communists joined up with the peasants of Bouzehar on the southern margins of the town, they simultaneously pushed northwards into the *douars* of El Aneb and Beni Ghomeriane where the most important peasant leader to emerge was Kouider Smail who was elected president of the *djemâa* of El Aneb on 16 Sep 1945. Smail's victory was just one of nine *djemâas* won by the PCA in Braz, a major breakthrough in the communist offensive to reach out into the *bled*.[17]

The Smail family was typical of the 'middle peasant' political leaders of the Chelif, extended households that occupied a strategic geo-political location in the *haouz* or piedmont, and were able to benefit from the proximity of the market and education in Duperré, while retaining their peasant base and identity. The Smail family, which included several brothers who were communist militants, occupied a farm that was located in the piedmont on a mule track close to the confluence of

[15] *Liberté*, 4 December 1947.

[16] AOM 4i199, report of *commissaire de police*, Duperré, 22 May 1950.

[17] AOM 91301/53, the PCA, although it took only 2,955 (36 per cent) of the total votes cast (8,182) in the CM Braz, it won nine of the eighteen *djemâas*, the other *douars* going to UDMA (1) and the pro-French 'Independents' (8). The nine PCA *djemâas* voted on the list *Union démocratique et anti-fasciste* were in the *douars* El Aneb, Beni Ghomeriane, Louroud, Bouarous, Beni Mehraba, Chemla, Tacheta, Zouggara, and Ouaguenay. The PCA vote was boosted by the absence of the MTLD which boycotted the elections.

the Oued Ebda and the Chelif River, about 3 miles from Duperré. The position of the farmhouse, in a hollow that made it invisible from the main road, was later to make it an ideal staging-post for the maquis, an entrepot for men and materials as they were filtered in or out from Duperré and along the tracks that penetrated northwards from the Chelif plain into the Dahra mountains.

The communists went immediately on the offensive within days of the *djemâa* victories in September 1945 when the two leaders of the Duperré section, Keddar and Ahmed Hadj arrived at the CM bureau, accompanied by the newly elected presidents, Kouider Smail of the *douar* El Aneb, and Abdelkader Mettai of Beni Ghomeriane, demanding to see the administrator. What was at stake was the highly contentious question of food distribution at a time when the population was facing famine conditions and, during a long, acrimonious meeting, Keddar insisted that the appointment of one dealer, Djeblar, to carry out the official distribution and sale of cereals was totally unacceptable.[18] The administrator replied that Keddar had no authority to speak on behalf of the population, and pointed out that there existed no evidence that could block the appointment of Djeblar. Keddar, 'raising his voice', replied that he could take no responsibility for any 'incidents' that might arise as a consequence and that a telegram of complaint had been sent to the Algiers government, to which the administrator responded that he was not prepared to tolerate a threat to public order. The administrator claimed that the communists were hostile to Djeblar because he had opposed their electoral list, that of the *Union démocratique et anti-fasciste*, and said that he was not prepared to tolerate such a political intrusion into what was a purely administrative matter. Keddar and Hadj Ahmed, he claimed, had attempted to give an 'anti-administrative' orientation to the recently elected *djemâas*.

The small incident is revealing of the aggressive style of contentious politics that the communists of Duperré were developing in the turbulent context of 1945, the year of Sétif, a widespread hunger, and a surge in mass nationalism. Keddar, by bringing along the two newly elected *djemâa* presidents, who appear to have said little during the talks, was actively training his protegée in the arts of 'anti-administrative' combat.

We can track some of Smail's activities over the next ten years through occasional police and press reports. He lost the *djemâa* election of November 1947 running on the rather bluntly named list of the *Union démocratique pour la suppression des communes mixtes*, but he lived close enough to Duperré to participate in the regular life of the town sector. In one report of November 1949 he is listed as an 'assessor' at a public meeting at which the majority of the two hundred in the audience came from the *douar* Beni Ghomeriane. Ahmed

[18] AOM 91301/53, deputy CM administrator in Duperré to the senior CM administrator in Miliana, 9 October 1945. This long, personal handwritten letter, provides an unusually detailed account of the confrontation with Keddar.

Keddar spoke on the redistribution of communal land to the Bouzehar peasants, while Abdelkader Hanachi praised Russia, the October revolution, and Marshal Stalin, represented as a force for peace in opposition to the United States, France, and global capitalism.[19] One can only conjecture on the reaction of the peasant audience to this mixture of land reform and the standard pro-Soviet rhetoric of the Cold War.

Smail became particularly active again during the year leading in to the insurrection of November 1954. A meeting in Duperré on 23 March 1953 led to a relaunch of the SPC under the presidency of Kouider Smail.[20] The union immediately began a major campaign, which reached the national press, in response to a catastrophic drought during the agricultural year 1952 to 1953. This revealed the enduring and shocking poverty of rural society in the Dahra and Ouarsenis, the immediate failure of the administration to cope with the crisis, in particular through the key agency, the SIPs, and the failure of the colonial regime to carry out the developmental policy first promised by the PACs in 1946.

On 3 April 1953 the trade union issued an appeal to the government and political parties to respond to the urgent crisis in the Chelif where there were all the classic signs of encroaching famine as families were forced to search along the roadside ditches for the bitter root *talghouda*, a wild plant that had become for nationalists the symbol of a failing colonial system:[21]

> This is the bleakest poverty. From early in the morning the peasants are to be seen along the ditches of the fields, uncultivated this year, searching for '*talghouda*' or other roots and plants to eat. . . . Others spend a whole day making up a load of wood that they sell for 50 to 60 francs in the village. . . . There are literally groups of women, children, and old folk in rags in search of an impossible subsistence.[22]

In May 1953 the SPC made headlines when a Chelif delegation of four farmers, including Kouider Smail, went to Algiers to present their demands to Farès, the president of the Algerian Assembly, to the *Union des syndicats* (CGT), and the head offices of the PCA, the *Ulema*, MTLD and UDMA, the SIP, and other bodies.[23] The four delegates described a catastrophic situation that had remained virtually unchanged since the famine of 1944–5. Grain reserves were exhausted, 40 per cent of livestock had died, and farmers had been forced to sell even their

[19] AOM 1K/402, RG Miliana, 14 November 1949. [20] *Liberté*, 9 April 1953.

[21] J. Fromage, 'Innovation politique', 415, 428, on the staged theatricality of Dr Bendjelloul's campaigning in March 1937 when he threw a bunch of *talghouda* at the feet of the CM administrator Logeart, 'Voilà, this is what 50,000 natives, people of the land, are forced to eat. They are dying of hunger . . .'.

[22] *Alger républicain*, 29 May 1953.

[23] *Alger républicain*, 29 May and 30 May 1953; *Liberté* 4 June 1953.

plough teams or to browse animals illegally in the forests where they faced heavy, punitive fines. The SPC president Kouider Smail provided an analysis of the geographical contrast to be found within the *douar* El Aneb between those peasants located in the richer piedmont zone on the margin of the Chelif plain, where a fifth of the population had some grain reserves or could glean on the land of the *colons*, if permitted. But in the mountainous and forested zone, 'where the land is worked by the hoe, the harvest return is nil and famine is palpable'.[24]

This major campaign, which attracted considerable national interest, was going on at the very moment that Smail was fighting the *djemâa* election of 11 April 1953 on the *Anti-colonialistes* ticket which he lost, 2 votes to 572, to the list of Abdelkader Boutra, the conservative *Républicains de fidélité françaises*. The communist vote of two was quite typical of the post-1948 Naegelen period of systemic electoral fraud. Smail lodged a formal complaint on the grounds that the *caid* Mahmoudi had surrounded the voting station with over a hundred of his partisans and intimidated voters and threatened the candidates with violence.[25]

After the PCA Central Committee finally decided to back the formation of an armed underground in June 1955, the Smail family was integrated into the first rural guerrilla, the *Combattants de la liberation* (CDL) inserted into the Chelif region during April 1956. On 4 April the junior officer Henri Maillot dramatically hijacked an army lorry carrying a large consignment of machine guns, rifles, and revolvers and part of this haul was placed in a cache on the Smail farm before being redistributed northwards via mule tracks to the PCA-ALN guerrilla that was forming in the Dahra.[26] When the Red Maquis was encircled by the army on 5 June, the communist leader from Cherchell, Mustapha Saadoune, managed to escape and travelled on foot to the Smail farm where he was integrated into the PCA-ALN maquis.[27] By now Kouider Smail was known to the intelligence services and it seems likely that he then joined the ALN maquis under the *nom-de-guerre* 'Si Kouider', described by the army as the 'the political and military chief of the Orleansville region', where he was killed by an army patrol on 6 June 1957. The long-term extension and organization of communist networks in El Aneb during the post-war period had prepared the ground for the later maquis and it was no coincidence that 'Si Larbi', the commander of the ALN forces chose to establish his early HQ in the *douar* towards October 1956.[28]

[24] *Alger républicain*, 30 May 1953. *Liberté*, 26 February 1953, the communist councillors of Duperré campaigned to defend charcoal burners who, on arrival in the markets, had had their goods and transport animals seized by the forest guards.

[25] AOM 9301/53, Abdelkader Boutra to prefect of Algiers, 18 April 1953.

[26] Serge Kastell, *Le Maquis Rouge. L'aspirant maillot et la guerre d'Algérie 1956* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 204–5.

[27] AOM 4i199, RG Miliana, 21 April 1956; *Mémoria*, 29 April 2014, online at <https://www.memoria.dz/archive>, interview with Saadoun.

[28] AOM 4SAS74, report of RG police, Miliana, 4 November 1956.

The *douars* Taouira and Beni Haoua

Along the highly indented coast east from the port of Ténès in the *douar* of Taourira the *djemâa* elections of November 1947 had led to the victory of the veteran peasant leader and communist Hadj Mohamed Zitoufi, a post that he had held continuously since 1919.[29] Zitoufi, as we have seen, was a communist militant of importance, and had been elected in March 1945 as national president of the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* (SPC). He had nurtured the young miner's trade union leader Abdallah Mokarnia in his successful bid to win the presidency of the adjacent *djemâa* of Beni Haoua in 1947.[30] Mokarnia's victory caused a considerable stir since the young militant, in defeating the administrative candidate, had challenged the authority and local power-base of his relative, the *caid* Hocine Mokrani. Under a front-page heading in the communist weekly *Liberté*, 'The *djemâa* elections are proof of the powerful roots of our party in the countryside', Mokarnia celebrated the PCA breakthrough across rural Algeria.[31]

The struggle for political control of the joint *douars* of Taouira and Beni Haoua provides an interesting example of the way in which the post-war tensions between pro-French and anti-colonial forces crystallized out in the *douars* around the contrasting poles of the *caid*, backed up by his armed *goums* and the administration, and the president of the *djemâa* and his delegates. During the 1930s Mohamed Zitoufi, a quite well-to-do farmer, was among the conservative notables that supported the colonial regime, and was one of the European and Algerian dignitaries that celebrated the investiture of Hocine Mokrani as *caid* of Beni Haoua in February 1938.[32] How and why Zitoufi, who had family ties with the Mokrani, entered into a bitter opposition to the *caid* is unclear, but the Second World War and Vichy period marked a point of political rupture, as it did in Algeria as a whole.

The Mokrani family, like the Saiah to the south, continued to have a strong religious influence in the region and was proud of its long history as faithful servants of France that had assisted General Bugeaud during the 1840s in defeating the Emir Abdelkader, helped crush the 1871 revolt in the Beni Menaceur, recruited volunteers during the First World War, and suppressed banditry.[33] Mohamed Zitoufi, by contrast, was a delegate for the CM of Ténès when a *Fédération des fellahs* for the department of Algiers was formed in June 1937.[34]

[29] *Liberté*, 4 December 1947, notes that Zitoufi won on a joint PPA/PCA list, taking 250 (97 per cent) of the total 259 votes.

[30] On Mokarnia, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 487–8.

[31] *Liberté*, 25 December 1947. Mokarnia took 92 per cent of the vote.

[32] *Echo d'Alger*, 16 February 1938. There is no evidence of Zitoufi's membership of the PCA before 1944.

[33] *Echo d'Alger*, 16 February 1938.

[34] See Chapter 8, p. 156, n. 1 on the *Fédération des fellahs* formed by Abdelkader Cadi, who in February 1938 became president of the *Confédération des fellahs d'Algérie* (*Echo d'Alger*, 26 February 1938), which united the three departmental Federations. Cadi, a typical member of the landed élite, was

Although the *Fédération* was dominated by a conservative élite, it campaigned for the defence of small farmers and peasants and for a reform that included a halt to expropriation, the transfer of state lands to the poor, a reform and democratization of the SIP, less punitive tax collection and forest regulation, and investment in *douar* infrastructures (schools, water supply, medical care).[35] It seems likely that the *Fédération des fellahs* provided the model for the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* that the PCA created in 1944–5, with Zitoufi as president. For Zitoufi, who probably joined the PCA at this moment, moving into the communist camp involved little change in his attitude to reform, in his relation to the local administration, or in his function as head of the *djemâa* of Taourira, as we will see later (Chapter 13). But Zitoufi had firmly nailed his colours to the anti-regime movement, and it was this act of treachery by a prominent member of his own family network that the *caid* Mokrani could not stomach, and precipitated a long-term *çof* battle for local honour and power, in which each side seized every opportunity to publicly humiliate the other.

In early 1945 the *caid* brought intense pressure to bear on Zitoufi and Mokarnia to abandon the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs*, and threatened to repudiate Mokarnia's sister, to whom he was married.[36] At this moment the harvest failure and great hunger of 1944–5 had reached its most dangerous peak in the *soudure*, and tensions in the peasantry were riding high when Zitoufi accused the *caid* and his brother, the field guard, of involvement in a sugar rationing fraud. On Sunday 22 April several men complained to Zitoufi in Francis Garnier that they had received rations of only 4 kilogrammes of barley that were distributed by the grocery store of Remusat, a leading member of the *colons* community. Remusat, when asked by Zitoufi what the ration should be, replied that he was not answerable to him and 'he couldn't care a damn about the syndicat and its leaders who would soon end up in prison'.[37] Remusat, the local administrator Monnier, and Mokrani, agreed among themselves to lodge a complaint with the gendarmes against Zitoufi for causing a public disturbance. The following day during a grain distribution the *caid* told the waiting crowd, 'You are like women since there is nobody among you capable of killing Zitoufi like a dog when he comes to the village'.[38]

Petty as these local village disputes may seem, they were symptomatic of very real divisions that were to carry long term political consequences, and the eventual

closely associated with Dr Bendjelloul and the *Élus*, and viewed the *Confédération* as a 'non-political' organization.

[35] *L'oranie populaire*, 4 September 1937.

[36] AOM 1K/485, letter of complaint from the bureau of the Ténès SPC to the CM administrator, 24 April 1945. The *caid* Hocine Mokrani had married Mokarnia's sister, whom the *caid* proceeded to expel from his household, although pregnant and with four children.

[37] AOM 1K/485, Ténès SPC to CM administrator, 24 April 1945.

[38] The SPC letter named seven witnesses from the *douar* Taourira to this scene.

involvement of Zitoufi and Mokarnia in the clandestine preparation of an armed maquis. In the deepening battle for power between *caid* and *djemâa* the president Zitoufi, able to draw on the support of the *djemâa* delegates and hundreds of peasants massed in the hills around Francis Garnier, had a stronger hand.[39]

Mokarnia's victory in the *djemâa* election of November 1947, which he achieved in part through the support of the radical peasant-workers of the Breira mines in Beni Haoua, marked a crushing defeat for the *caid*.[40] A series of articles in the communist press, some of them written by Mokarnia, spelled out the triumph and political maturity of peasants across Algeria who, in spite of government attempts to make inscription on voting registers as difficult as possible, and widespread intimidation at polling stations, had turned out in force to show their 'determination to have done with a regime of bullying, injustice and oppression. . . . we salute this awakening to the life of the nation among the most exploited population in our country'.[41] So confident were the communists after the election that they carried out a propaganda offensive to try and persuade the fourteen *djemâa* presidents gathered in Ténès for a council meeting on 4–5 February 1948 to form a separate regional bureau.[42]

It is noteworthy that the crucial elections for the Algerian Assembly, which involved larger constituency areas, saw the continuing battle for power in the Chelif between the *grandes familles*. Abderrahmane Bouthiba, from the clan that had 'traditionally' asserted its base in the *douars* of the Ténès region, tried to build up alliances with the UDMA and PCA, in opposition to the Saiah family that, since Sétif, had become the prime 'loyalist' force. Bouthiba, who welcomed Ferhat Abbas on a campaigning visit to Orleansville on 1–2 February 1948, made contact with several *djemâa* presidents in the Ténès 9th circumscription, including Zitoufi, Mokarnia, Hadj Abbes of Béni Merzoug, Lakhdar Belbrahim of Herenfa, and Yacoubi of Dahra, the latter a sworn enemy of the Brahimi family which supported the Saiah.[43] While the Saiah clan continued to control major elections to higher-level bodies through dominance of the *caids*, most of them family members, counter-alliances like that of the Bouthiba were built upon networks of *djemâa* presidents who constituted the 'natural' opponents of the *caids* in the *douar*.

[39] AOM 4i209, RG of Orleansville to head of RG Algiers division, 5 July 1946, noted that Zitoufi, described as secretary of the local section of the CGT, had in turn been placing constant pressure on the *caid* to work in favour of the AML (UDMA), but Mokrane was viewed as a weak man who would crumble too easily under pressure from the communists.

[40] AOM 914/20, *Procès-verbal*, electoral return, 20 November 1947, at Francis Garnier, gave the Mokarnia list the *Union démocratique* 402 votes (92 per cent) to Mokrane 34.

[41] *Liberté*, 4 December 1947; Younès Kouch, 'Aux élections des djemâas. Victoire de l'union'.

[42] AOM 4i209, monthly report of CM Ténès, 3 March 1948.

[43] AOM 4i209, monthly report of CM Ténès, 3 March 1948. Bouthiba, as president of the Algiers Federation of Fellahs in 1937, already had contact with Zitoufi, the representative for the Ténès CM.

Mustapha Saadoun and the Cherchell Region

The final zone of *djemâa* activism branched out from the town of Cherchell, mainly under the leadership of the communist leader Mustapha Saadoun. The mountain *douars* of the CM of Cherchell corresponded to a large area that had originally been controlled by the Berber-speaking tribe of the Beni Menaceur. In July and August 1871 the entire zone burst into insurrection under the influence of the Rahmania brotherhood, and the CM administrator Zannettacci in 1953 still viewed the mountain inhabitants as turbulent, 'inclined to rebellion, in love with independence, proud and difficult to administer' (see Chapter 8, pp. 157–8).[44]

The key communist militant in this region was Mustapha Saadoun, born in Cherchell on 26 August 1918, into a family of market-gardeners that lived in a traditional Arab house at Ain K'ciba in the old quarter of Cherchell, but daily worked a 2 hectare farm at Medoura outside the city gates.[45] Mustapha attended a French school, the only Algerian in his class, and gained the prized school-leaving certificate (CEP) in 1934, a basic educational qualification that proved vital in his later advance as a militant in the Communist Party. After serving in the marines from 1938 to 1945, he returned to find that his younger brother Ahcène had been arrested on charges of organizing a revolt in the Military Academy of Cherchell and had been sentenced to death.[46]

During the year-long campaign to gain Ahcène's pardon, Mustapha joined the Communist Party and became active in organizing among agriculture workers, particularly during the bitter harvest strikes that took place in the Metidja and Chelif plains during 1947 to 1948. During the Tuesday market at Marengo in February 1950 Mustapha witnessed an army team, complete with musical instruments (*tebal* and *ghaita*) and a weighing machine, that was seeking to recruit poor peasants for Indochina by offering them a bonus according to their body weight. Mustapha wrote an account for *Liberté* of how an angry crowd of land workers and peasants, shouting 'we are not cattle up for sale', forced the recruiters to rapidly decamp. The following day Saadoun was charged by a Blida judge with a violation of state security, and condemned to a heavy fine and four months in prison.[47]

[44] AOM 4i197, S. Zannattacci, *Monographie politique*, 20 February 1953, 43–66.

[45] The fullest biography is by Mohamed Rebah, *Des chemins et des hommes* (Algiers: Éditions Mille-Feuilles, 2010 edn), who interviewed Saadoun during 2006 to 2008. His recollections provide one of the richest sources on communist organization in the Chelif region; see also R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 541–2; see also the article by Nora Sari in *Mémoria.*, April 2014, online at <https://www.memoria.dz/archive>.

[46] On the plot to trigger an insurrection in the military academy of Cherchell, led by Amar Ouamrane on 24 May 1945, see B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 182–3. The Saadoun family became famous in the region for its militancy, and of the six sons, three joined the PPA and three the PCA. The 'ultras' of Cherchell finally exacted a bloody revenge by massacring nine men on 28 November 1956, three of them from the Saadoun family; see *El Watan*, 28 November 2006, 'Cherchell: Les fusillés du 28 novembre aux oubliettes'.

[47] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 34–6.

The Cherchell communists were active in spreading their rural networks into the *douars* along the coast west of the town, and southwards into El Gourine. At the time of the Sétif revolt in May 1945 Ahmed Brakni, his son Kaddour, and Mohammed Dahnoun had incited nationalist unrest in the *douar* of El Gourine, for which they were arrested and sent into exile by Zannettacci. The *douar* was subjected to intense propaganda by both the PCA and PPA throughout 1944 to 1947, when Ahmed Brakni was elected president of the *djemâa*. Through 1948 and 1949, claimed the administrator, Brakni stirred up resistance in El Gourine and 'incited the Beni-Menaceur [tribe] to refuse payment of the taxes, not to submit their harvest declarations, and even to demonstrate against their *caid*'.[48] Cherchell, Marceau (Menaceur), Marengo (Hadjout), Zurich (Sidi Amar), Novi (Sidi Ghiles), Gouraya, and Dupleix (Damous), were all identified as 'centres of hostility to the French presence or kernels of resistance organized in cells by the PPA and PCF that carry out propaganda among the rural population'.[49] In 1953 Saadoun was reported as active in the iron mine of Sadoudra in the *douar* Gouraya which employed 120 workers.[50] He and Alphonse Quintilla, and Mohamed Cherif, had organized first a CGT union branch there, and later a communist cell of twenty members.

Saadoun went on to play a prominent role in the Red Maquis (Chapter 12) and, following his escape and integration into the ALN, he worked with a newly formed guerrilla group under Ahmed Ghebalou that established a new HQ in the Dahra mountains in late June 1956. From there Saadoun, through contact with Rabah Benhamou, Gaston Donnat, and Abdallah Mokarnia in the Ténès region on 1 November, effected a liaison with the ex-Communist Beni Haoua maquis.

The *djemâa* Elections of 1947: A Critical Turning Point

Elections, which a self-proclaimed parliamentary democracy could hardly abolish, provided Algerians with an exceptional opportunity to mobilize in defiance of the authorities. In the Chelif elections provided the main forum in which radical networks practised the skills of writing, printing, and distributing propaganda, moving speakers and agents by private car and taxi, and fund raising. The communists contested almost every type of election, including to the National Assembly and Algerian Assembly, even when they had little chance of winning, a sign that what was at stake was less the possibility of placing representatives than an opportunity to demonstrate the power of the party at street level, its discipline and courage.[51]

[48] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 69. [49] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 69.
[50] AOM 91/1K123, *Monographie politique*, CPE Gouraya, *c.*1953.
[51] M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.758–9; *Liberté*, 24 June 1954, reported on the poor result of Abdelkader Babou in the elections to the Algiers *Conseil général*, victim of the usual fraud, but the campaign had enabled the communist to 'speak to millions of peasants'.

Such an opportunity presented itself in the *djemâa* elections of late 1947 which, contrary to the intentions of the French authorities, led to a massive extension of the anti-colonial movement in the *douars*. Immediately after the Sétif massacre of May–June 1945 Adrien Tixier announced his proposal for a radical reform of local government based on the democratization of the *djemâas*, and appointed Lucien Paye as the head of the new *Diréction des réformes* to oversee the programme. It soon became apparent that the reform would lead, inevitably, to the abolition of the CM system and the *caids*, as was eventually confirmed by the Organic Statute of 20 September 1947. Alarm bells were ringing with the conservative defenders of the methods of the old *Affaires algériennes* still ensconced in the Algiers government and among the powerful lobby of right-wing politicians that plotted to contain and undermine Chataigneau's reform agenda. They succeeded in part of their objective by the passage of a Statute that made abolition of the *communes mixtes* and *caids* dependent on the future Algerian Assembly that, it was calculated, would bury the clauses.[52] They remained nervous, however, at the prospect of losing the crucial elections to the Algerian Assembly, planned for 15 January 1948, and urgently sought every means to fix the vote.

Although how the right plotted against reform still remains unclear, the communist press exposed the surprise move of the government to call a snap election by an order that suspended all sitting *djemâas* and made them subject to re-election between the 15 November and 15 December. This precipitate plan was engineered to wrong-foot the nationalists and communists by giving them only three weeks in which to prepare, to draw up candidate lists, and to organize their supporters, a particularly difficult process in the interior where inhabitants were dispersed over a vast space, and often lived many hours distant from polling stations. The pro-government, so-called 'administrative' or 'independent' candidates would, it was calculated, have a field day, and by seizing control of the *douars* in late 1947 enable the *grandes familles* and *caidat* to dominate the rural masses and to guarantee control of the vital elections to the Algerian Assembly that were now deferred to April.[53] However, the government grossly miscalculated and the manoeuvre backfired since the MTLD, which had abstained from the *djemâa* elections of 1945, now surged forward and, sometimes working in alliance with the PCA and UDMA, had a

[52] See M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.770–3. The abolition was proposed in Clause 50 and 53 of the Statute; C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 220–2. The Organic Law, in an identical manoeuvre, extended the vote to Algerian women; see Neil MacMaster, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954–62* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 51–2.

[53] *Liberté*, 6 November 1947, and *Alger républicain*, 12 November 1947, exposed this plan to impact on the Algerian Assembly election, and to prevent the formation of a majority in the Algerian college that would suppress the CM.

resounding success in the countryside. The central Communist Party that had been so resistant to a peasant strategy now, in a document of early January 1948, fully recognized the radical implications of the *djemâa* elections that had led to an 'anti-administrative upheaval'. It called on sections of the party in the interior to carry out a systematic census of all *douars*, to make contact with the newly elected *djemâa* representatives, and to develop a new 'solidarity to help penetrate into the peasantry and to assure victory in the elections to the Algerian Assembly'.[54]

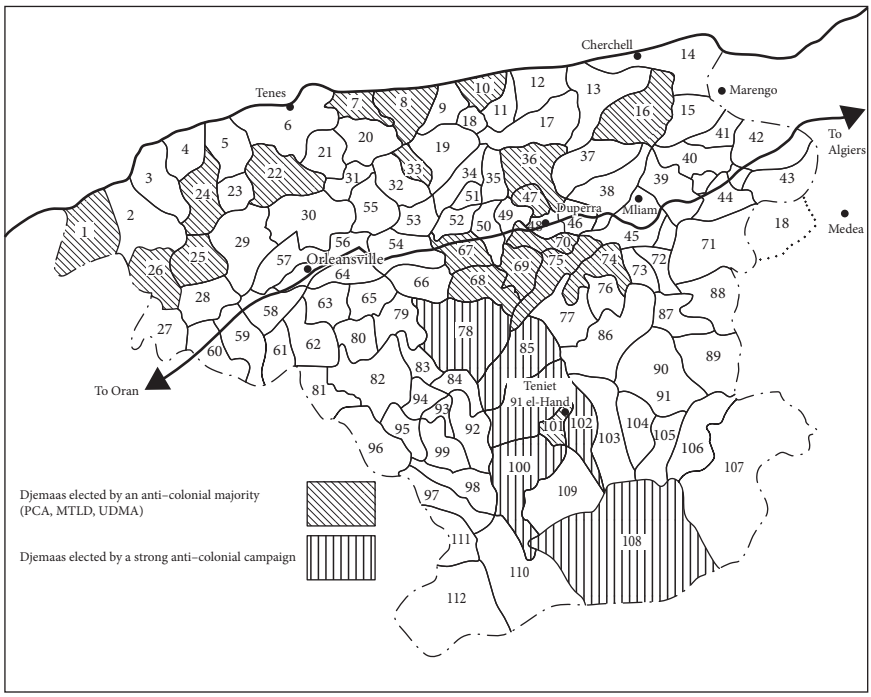
Following sharp on the heels of the municipal elections of October, which had seen a massive victory for the MTLD that captured 110 towns across Algeria, the *djemâa* elections of late 1947 presented the anti-colonial parties with an unprecedented opportunity to carry their propaganda work into the isolated rural areas where, for the first time, thousands of peasants were able to vote for radical nationalist candidates. During this period the PCA was seeking to create a united front organization, the *Front national démocratique* (FND), with the other oppositional parties, and this had some success when the communists and UDMA were able to agree on joint lists in some *djemâas*.[55] Although the abrasive Messalists tended to rebuff the other parties, in practice there was considerable clandestine cooperation, in particular as the PCA and the CGT served as a 'cover' for militants from the banned PPA who were exposed to a more intense police repression. In the Ouarsenis the CM administrator of Teniet el Haad reported how the PPA had during the *djemâa* elections of December 1947 penetrated into the mountain *douars* of Ighoud, Bennaouri, Beni Meharez, Meddad, and Khobazza with the assistance of militants in the town that were 'officially affiliated to the PCA'.[56]

The covert, and often shifting alliances between the different anti-colonial forces, makes it difficult to identify *djemâa* electoral gains by party affiliation, but in all some nineteen *douars* in the Chelif region can be identified as remaining with, or passing into, the oppositional camp during the elections of late 1947, while a large area of the Ouarsenis saw the penetration of militant organizations into a further seven *douars* (see Map 4 with Table 2).

[54] ANP F/60/1461, *Direction de la sécurité générale, Synthèse quotidienne de renseignements*, 6 January 1948, quoting from a PCA document, '*Sous le signe de l'union des ouvriers et des paysans-djemâas et Assemblée Algérienne*'.

[55] On the complex negotiations for cooperation between the PCA, UDMA, and MTLD/PPA during 1946 and 1947, see M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.745–92. The PCA-UDMA collaboration led to the gain of *djemâa* elections in the *douars* of Beni Merzoug, Zouggara, Oued Ouaguenay, El Ghorine, and Taourira, the latter held by M. Zitoufi with 250 out of 259 votes.

[56] AOM 4i209, report of Gauthier, administrator of CM Teniet el Haad to sub-prefect of Miliana, 2 February 1948.



Map 4 *Djemâa* elections of 1947 indicating the *douars* won by a PPA, PCA, or UDMA majority. All of the 113 *douars* in the Chelif region, listed below in alphabetical order, can be identified by a number on the map (see Table 2). Also identified on the map are a cluster of seven *douars* centred on Teniet el Haad in which there was a strong, nationalist campaign. Mapping by Peter Gibbs.

Djilali Belhadj and the Electoral Battle for the *douar* Zeddine, 1947

The final part of this chapter provides a case study of a confrontation during the 1947 election in the *douar* Zeddine south-west of Duperré which is particularly well documented and provides insight into the way in which *caidal* and *djemâa* forces confronted each other on the ground.[57]

The socialist militant Ahmed Boumendjel, in a remarkable analysis of the system of electoral fraud, noted that crude manipulation of the process could not be carried out so readily in the towns since there were too many observers

[57] The archives for the CM of Braz retain the key documents and correspondence relating to the organization of the Zeddine election between 23 and 30 November 1947, including election posters, electoral registers, the party-list voting ballots, the signed minutes of the count and later installation of the *djemâa*, and gendarmes and administrative reports. Such recently classified archives throw a new light on the dynamics of the political conflict taking place at the grass roots and clarifies procedures that have remained until now opaque in the secondary literature and autobiographical sources.

Table 2 Key to the *douars* in the Chelif region, *djemâa* elections of 1947.

Douar	Map No.	Douar	Map No.	Douar	Map. No.
Adelia	39	**Bouzehar**	**70**	Oued Sebt	43
Aghbal	11	Chenoua	14	Oued Talbenet	88
Ahl el Oued	76	Chembel	56	Oued Tighzert	90
Ain el Anseur	104	Chouchaoua	79	Ouled Abd Allah	2
Aribs	46	**Dahra**	**1**	Ouled Ammar	111
Aziz	107	Damous	9	Ouled ben Sliman	96
Baache	3	Djebel Louh	89	Ouled Bessem Cheraga	98
Baghdoura	23	Djendel	71	Ouled Farès	29
Beni Bel Hassen	99	Doui Hasseni	108	Ouled Ghalia	93
Beni Boudouane	78	Duperré	48	Ouled Gheraba	97
Beni bou Attab	83	El Adjeraf	57	Ouled Ziad	27
Beni bou Khannous	82	**El Aneb**	**36**	Oum el Drou	64
Beni Boukni	50	**El Ghourine**	**16**	**Rouina**	**67**
Beni Bou Milouk	19	El Hammam	40	Sahel	15
Beni Chaib	92	El Harrar	49	Sbahia	73
Beni Chemela	52	El Khemis	103	Sidi el Aroussi	58
Beni Djerjin	31	El Medad	91	Sidi Simiane	13
Beni Fathem	87	Fodda	54	Sinfita	20
Beni Ghomeriane	**47**	Gouraya	12	Siouf	106
Beni Haoua	**8**	Guerboussa	62	Sly	61
Beni Hindel	94	Haraouat	86	Sobah	28
Beni Lent	112			Tacheta	32
Beni Mahausen	51	Harchoun	65	Taflout	59
Beni Maida	110	**Herenfa**	**25**	Talassa	4
Beni Meharez	102	**Heumis**	**22**	Tamelahat	95
Beni Meni	41	Ighouat	100	**Taourira**	**7**
Beni Meraheba	34	Khobbaza	85	Taza	105
Beni Merzoug	**24**	**Larhat**	**19**	Temdrara	80
Beni Naoura	109	Lyra	77	Ténès	6
Beni Ouazzan	81	**M'chaia**	**26**	**Teniet el Haad**	**101**
Beni Rached	55	Main	21	Tharia	53
Beni Slimane	35	Medinet Medjadja	30	Tiberkanine	66
Beni Tamou	5	Miliana	45	Tsighaout	63
Bethaia	84	Ouamri	113	Zaccar	38
Bou Hallouan	44	Oued Deurdeur	72	Zatyma	18
Bouhlal	17	**Oued Djelida**	**74**	Zeboudj el Ouost	60
Bou Maad	37	Oued Djer	42	**Zeddine**	**68**
Bou Rached	**69**	**Oued Ouaguenay**	**75**	**Zouggara**	**33**

present and here the stakes were less high since only a tenth of Algerian votes were involved. Fraud was very much a strategy carried out in the interior, described as 'a battle zone', where there was so much more at stake since the countryside contained the great mass of voters, and there was little that the opposition could do to try and police the corruption taking place. The flagrant level of fixing had reached monumental proportions, notes Boumendjel, as in the Chelif in 1951

when in the *douar* Beni Rached the Saiah list had received all 783 votes, and the MTLD, UDMA, PCA zero each.[58]

Both the MTLD and the communists were keenly aware of the numerous methods that were habitually deployed by the authorities to interfere in the electoral process, and attempted to counter it in every possible way, including sending squads of militants from the towns into the countryside to counter intimidation by the *caid*'s henchmen and police and to place their own observers inside the voting station.[59] The nationalists knew that the greatest opportunity for fraud arose from the ballot paper system of voting by which each party list printed their own ballots for display in the electoral station. Since these were often withheld or destroyed by the *caids* and local officials, they would go to great lengths to smuggle their own bulletins into the bureaux, but these were often intercepted.[60] Even when more than one list was on display *caids* would not allow peasants to secretly select and place one in the envelope, but thrust an 'open' ballot into their hands, also a check to ensure that 'troublesome' individuals would be later punished by being removed from any clientele list and denied foodstuffs, seed, or jobs. Since ballot papers carried no signature or mark, and were simply folded into an envelope, it was relatively easy to illegally stuff the urns with pre-filled envelopes.[61] In one document the prefect of Algiers reported to the Governor how the appointment, promotion, or demotion of *caids* took into account the level of energy which they showed during elections to ensure that the opposition would make no gains.

By 1947 all elections had become the terrain of almost ritualistic demonstrations of force by the contending forces of state and anti-colonial opposition, and the militants of the MTLD were especially primed to intervene aggressively.[62] The administrator of Braz reported that the two-week campaign leading into the

[58] Ahmed Boumendjel, 'Chroniques. L'Algérie unanime . . .', *Esprit* 183 (1951), 518; Ahmed was the brother of Ali Boumendjel the UDMA leader and lawyer who was later murdered by parachutists on 26 March 1957, see Malika Rahal, *Ali Boumendjel. Une affaire française. Une histoire algérienne* (Algiers/Paris: Les Belles Lettres/Barzach, 2010).

[59] G. Donnat, *Afin que nul n'oublie*, 312–13. The communist school teacher recounts how he went by car with the miner's trade union leader Mokarnia during the later election of 17 April 1955 to act as observers in isolated voting stations in the Dahra mountains. Everywhere they witnessed the same scene of poor, frightened peasants, who had been forced through various sanctions to leave their *mechtas* at the crack of dawn. After queuing for hours in lines between armed guards, they were eventually welcomed by the *caid* who handed them a single ballot paper, that of the 'administrative' candidate. Donnat and Mokarnia, although official observers, were physically ejected from the bureaux as 'troublemakers', or simply refused entrance by aggressive, armed guards.

[60] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 17–18, relates how in 1948 as a lad he was recruited to carry MTLD ballots in secret from Ténès to the bureau at Bouchegal, some 21 kilometres across the mountains at night, thus outwitting Mohamed Zitoufi.

[61] B. Hadjadj, *Les voleurs*, helped his father, a *caid* in the 1948 election, by stuffing envelopes in packets of fifty with 'administrative' ballots.

[62] M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.793. During the crucial elections to the Algerian Assembly on 5 April 1948 large PPA crowds invaded the bureaux or stoned the forces of order, and at least eleven rioters were shot dead.

djemâa elections had been of an unprecedented intensity led by the urban MTLD cells at Rouina, Kherba, Duperré, and Affreville. They had sent militants out into the surrounding *douars*, in particular Chemla, Zeddine, and Bourached, while a visit of Messali Hadj to Oued Djer had fired-up the peasants of Boumedfa, Bourkika, and Ameur el Ahl.[63] The election battle had been most violent at Zeddine under the PPA leadership of Djilali Belhadj, and the administrator had moved in extra police forces to contain any trouble.[64] At the heart of the opposition, and leader of the MTLD list, was Djilali Belhadj, born in Zeddine in January 1921, the son of a well-to-do farmer and entrepreneur Mohammed Belhadj. The latter was typical of the rising class of rural bourgeoisie that prospered after the First World War in the piedmont *douars* of the Chelif valley; he had served during the First World War as a reserve officer in the French army, became *caid* of Zeddine, and acquired a relatively wealthy status as owner of a 117 hectare farm, a flour mill, and threshing machines that he rented to other peasants.[65] Mohammed Belhadj, vice president of the Duperré section of the MTLD, had the reputation of a harsh, ambitious man and in 1947 he was publicly accused by the communist Ahmed Keddar of having abused his position while *caid* and enriching himself by creating a climate of fear among the peasants.[66]

His son, Djilali Belhadj, after a priviledged lycée education, graduated as a junior officer from the military academy in Cherchell, and worked for a while as secretary in the local town hall. This was the classic career pattern for the rising class of middle peasants seeking to find promotion into the *caidat* or local politics, but the government removal of his father, Mohammed Belhadj, as *caid* may have driven the family into the classic form of *çof* politics in which opposition to the dominant clan receiving government favours went hand-in-hand with opposition to the French regime itself.[67] The conservative Mohammed Belhadj, who shared many characteristics of the communist leader Hadj Zitoufi, seems to have been an unlikely revolutionary, and yet by 1948 he was welcoming Messali Hadj during his

[63] AOM 91301/59, administrator CM Braz to prefect of Algiers, 15 December 1947.

[64] The elections in Zeddine had already a reputation for being the most turbulent in the area; see AOM 91301/59, CM administrator of Braz to sub-prefect, November 1946, a report on an MTLD challenge to the presence of the *caid* in the voting station; and report of 9 April 1948 on further disputes during the election to the Algerian Assembly, when Belkacem Brahimi was arrested and sentenced to two months in prison and a fine of 30,000 francs for 'anti-French' statements.

[65] H. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 157, was sufficiently impressed by Belhadj's standing to describe Djilali as a '*fils de grande tente*', but the family do not seem to have had any aristocratic status.

[66] AOM 4i199, report of *Commissaire de police*, Duperré, 8 October 1947. *Liberté*, 29 October 1953, reported that the Belhadj family had refused to pay twenty workers that it had employed in their threshing business at the end of the 1953 harvest and who were seeking redress through the *Conseil des prudhommes*.

[67] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 209; a close neighbour and later associate of Djilali Belhadj, recognized that he was not ideologically opposed to the French administration and remained a strong francophile.

occasional tours through the Chelif, and was described by the local administration as '*très dangereux*'.[68]

Unknown to the intelligence services the Belhadj family provided, in their farmhouse in Zeddine, a secret venue for a special meeting of the Central Committee of the PPA in December 1948 when the Kabyle Ait Ahmed presented a detailed report on a peasant-based revolutionary strategy (see Chapter 10). I return later to this and to Djilali Belhadj's involvement with the top-secret paramilitary organization, the OS, and to his subsequent recruitment by the French secret service, under the pseudonym 'Kobus', as head of a 'third force' operation in the Ouarsenis. The Belhadj family were influential notables in Zeddine and its region and, almost as a point of honour, they were not prepared to stand by while the *caids* and administrators engaged in electoral fraud. Djilali Belhadj made his presence felt in the voting station of Zeddine during the *djemâa* election on 23 November 1947, which appears to have passed without incident. Belhadj as an observer of some status could not be readily intimidated or excluded from the vote and his MTLD list of fourteen candidates, on a turnout of 69 per cent, won the *djemâa* with 353 votes to that of 317 for the pro-government *Union musulman pour la défense du douar* headed by Mohamed Hayaoui.

However, a week later, during the official installation of the new MTLD *djemâa*, an acrimonious row broke out when the administrator Villette placed the conservative *caid* Mir Missoum as president of the proceedings, an appointment that Djilali Belhadj bitterly contested. The official minute of the meeting, signed by the newly installed *djemâa*, included a detailed 'observation' that a violent altercation had taken place when Belhadj told the *caid* that he had no place as president of the assembly, to which Missoum had shouted, 'I will kill you like a dog', and stormed off after telling his *khodja* and the fraction chiefs to remove all the chairs and table. Missoum went to the gendarmerie to make a statement in which he accused Belhadj of shoving and insulting him, shouting, 'You are a mere slave and the son of a dog. . . . I don't give a damn for you and the entire French administration.' On 5 December the *djemâa* responded with its own complaint to the sub-prefect, and the *caid* dispatched a further account of the fracas to the senior administrator in Miliana on 8 December. In this Messoum emphasized the dangerous political threat of the MTLD that by claiming that the *caid* was a nobody and through its confrontational behaviour threatened to undermine respect for his authority on which the administration of his *douar* depended. It was time to request the higher authorities to act fast to place a brake on this movement.

This was not the end of the matter since several notables from the losing list, the *Union musulman*, lodged a formal complaint with the prefecture for an investigation on the grounds that five of the MTLD candidates were not eligible, a

[68] AOM 4i206, Miliana RG report, 22 January 1948; Orleansville RG report, 16 October 1947 (visit of Khider to Ténès, Oued Fodda, and Orleansville); report 21 July 1948 (visit of Messali Hadj).

petition that was upheld in a hearing of the Council of the Algiers prefecture on 16 April 1948.[69] The Zeddine *djemâa* was thus, along with most of the *djemâas* won by the MTLD and PCA in the Chelif region in 1947, closed down by juridical-administrative decisions during the Naegelen backlash.

This incident in Zeddine was typical of numerous other local battles between *caids* and *djemâas* at this time, theatrical conflicts which, like the campaigns led by Keddar in Duperré, were played out in public before a peasant audience. In a society of honour the object was to humiliate and subvert the opponent. It is not always possible to gauge the impacts of such ritual duels on the rural population, but those peasants that had voted for the Belhadj list, only to find the result overturned by a dubious ruling of the prefectoral council, would have been confirmed in their opinion of the corrupt and undemocratic nature of the colonial regime. Few of them would have known at the time of the November election that Djilali Belhadj had since February 1947 been one of the key founders of the top-secret paramilitary OS, but growing numbers would have been won over to the position that only armed rebellion could break the stranglehold of the colonial regime.

The Government Counter-attack on the *djemâas*, 1948–50

The government had instigated the snap election of all the *djemâas* in November 1947 as a means of securing a rural base before the critical election of the Algerian Assembly in April 1948 where victory was necessary to block the nationalist surge and to ensure that the abolition of the CM system and *caids* would never be implemented. However, the cynical ploy seems to have back-fired since the MTLD, standing for the first time in the *djemâas*, scored a major victory and revealed the degree to which even the isolated mountain zones were being radicalized. What was particularly worrying for the CM administrators in the Ouarsenis and Dahra was the evidence that militant anti-colonial movements had breached the *cordon-sanitaire* that the authorities had erected since the nineteenth century to isolate the mountainous 'native reserves' from the toxic effects of urban-industrial society, trade unions, socialism, and nationalism. The CM administrator Zannattacci commented how the intensive PPA and PCA propaganda drive during 1945 to 1948, in a situation of widespread poverty, had made big inroads 'in the rural zones that had until recently been impervious to such political ideologies', and with the *djemâa* elections had, for example, turned half the population in the *douar* El Gourine against the government.

[69] The Council adjudication accepted that one candidate lived in Duperré not Zeddine, a second was not on the electoral register, while three others were excluded as close blood-relatives, despite MTLD evidence to the contrary.

The alarm bells were ringing in the Algerian government, which was desperate to halt the dangerous shift in power in the *bled*. The liberal reforming governor Chataigneau, along with his top adviser Lucien Paye, were levered from office and replaced by the hardline socialist Naegelen to oversee the crucial election.[70] An unprecedented wave of repression and electoral fraud was unleashed before and during the election to the Algerian Assembly, now deferred to 5 April. In late December 1947 the government decided not to take the politically risky option of a global ban on the MTLD, but followed a strategy that would involve the arrest and prosecution of targeted militants for subversion of French sovereignty, and was calculated to eliminate those in the *bled* who might play a key oppositional role or stand as candidates in the coming election.[71]

The Chelif region witnessed just such a drive to harass and arrest newly elected *djemâa* presidents or members. For example, the presidents of the *djemâas* of Heumis and Dahra were incarcerated in the prison of Orleansville, although they were eventually released without charge, to the joy of their peasant supporters who planned to celebrate the occasion with a grand feast (*taam*).[72] Kaddour Kaced, president of the *djemâa* of Bethaia was threatened with arrest, but was only suspended for one month because of his military record; Abdelkader Lahmar, the secretary of the *douar* M'Chaia was suspended; while the entire seventeen-man *djemâa* of Khobbaza was imprisoned. During the Assembly election on 4 and 11 April the government moved large police forces and troops to stand by in the Chelif, and according to the sub-prefect of Orleansville 'had assured good order under excellent conditions'.[73]

Since repression and intimidation had not succeeded in dampening peasant resistance in the *djemâa*, the government resorted to a second line of attack which was to use reserve administrative or legal powers to suspend or dissolve *djemâas*. Within days of the Assembly elections the Council of the Algiers Department annulled the Bouzehar *djemâa*, a decision that, after an appeal by the PCA to the *Conseil d'État*, was made definitive in 1950.[74] A similar process closed down the

[70] M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.794–6; Marcel-Edmond Naegelen, *Mission en Algérie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1962).

[71] M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.795–8; the Minister of the Interior later admitted that 1,604 individuals had been prosecuted, many of them on trumped up charges. The 5 April election day saw both massive vote-rigging, but also high levels of police and army violence during which at least eleven people were shot dead.

[72] AOM 1K/156, monthly report sub-prefect Orleansville, 2 July 1948; CAOM 4i209, administrator of CM Ténès to sub-prefect Orleansville, 29 June 1948, with copy of an order that banned the annual pilgrimage and *taam* at the shrine of Sidi Maamar that, he claimed, had been organized for political reasons, 'to celebrate the liberation of two members of the *djemâa* of the *douar* Heumis'.

[73] AOM 1K/156, monthly report, 28 April 1948.

[74] AOM 1K/402, order of dissolution 16 April 1948. On 24 January 1950 the sub-prefect of Miliana had again recommended to the prefect of Algiers suspension of the *djemâa* of Bouzehar and its replacement by a *délégation spéciale*. Keddar, at a public meeting of the Duperré communists on 21 May 1950, explained that the dissolution of the *djemâa* was a purely political act taken simply because it was a successful communist-led body.

djemâa El Ghourine, controlled by Ahmed Brakni, as well as the *djemâas* of Heumis, Dahra, Rouina, Zeddine, Bou Rached, and Beni Haoua, Mokrani's base.[75] The elimination of the *djemâa* Zeddine, headed by Djilali Belhadj, organizer of military operations in the clandestine *Organisation spéciale* (OS), led to its replacement by a pro-administration *djemâa* under the list *Union et des intérets du douar*, led by Belqasem Mir, a relative of the *caid*.[76]

In conclusion, the seven months between the passing of the Organic statute of 20 September and the elections to the Algerian Assembly on 4 April 1948 marked a crucial political watershed, the point at which the government finally blocked any possibility of a negotiated, reformist solution to the terminal crisis of Algerian colonialism. For the CM administrators in the Chelif region the April election marked a great success for the regime, the moment at which the dangerous march of nationalist subversives from the towns into the mountains in order to contaminate the simple, 'primitive' peasants was halted and reversed. Looking back with confidence in February 1953 Zannettacci, the CM administrator of Cherchell, after a close analysis of the advance of PPA and PCA militants into the Dahra between 1944 and 1948, remarked that the Assembly election of 4 April had marked the first serious backstop to extremist penetration of rural society.[77]

The next four years, claimed Zannettaci, had confirmed the success of the CM system that had been threatened with dissolution. It had restored the 'equilibrium' of the traditional order, the peasantry had remained calm, and 'overall the *douars* of the *commune mixte* remain deeply attached to us'. Since April 1948 the rural masses had showed less and less interest in politics, a restoration of traditionalism that was marked by a renewal of religious fervour ('*maraboutisme*'), 'their ancient religious customs' that were assisting, 'the mountain Berbers to cleanse themselves of toxic political ideologies'. If subversive propaganda had had an impact on the peasantry between 1944 and 1948 it was because of their 'profound poverty', and for a population that was preoccupied above all by bread-and-butter issues, the key remedy to the extremists was economic reform: 'In our countryside the economy takes priority over politics.'[78]

The conservative administrator of the Chelif CM, Julien Rohrbacher, looking back from December 1952, presented a similar discourse, one in which an 'equilibrium' had been restored, the peasants of the Ouarsenis 'have remained tranquil and continue to be preoccupied with the harvest', and while the authorities needed to remain vigilant, he concluded, 'The *commune mixte* of Chelif is a

[75] *Liberté*, 14 August 1952, reported the removal of Abdallah Mokarnia as president at Beni Haoua on 24 April. Mokarnia riposted that the CM administrator could not tolerate the authentic voice of the people and that the peasants and workers of his *douar* were being overtaxed to pay for 'the administrator's refrigerator, dining room furniture and bedroom'.

[76] AOM. 1K/886, CM Braz, *Scrutin*, 13 January 1949.

[77] AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, Cherchell, 20 February 1953, p. 71.

[78] AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, Cherchell, 20 February 1953, p. 72.

Table 3 Election results for the second college (Algerian voters), 1948–51.

Constituency	date	Pro-government candidate	votes	Communist candidate	votes
Algerian Assembly 8th circumscription (Orleansville)	4 April 1948	Abdelkader Saiah	9,595	None	
9th circumscription (Ténès)	4 April 1948	Hadj Brahim Saiah	4,516	Mokarnia	3
(1) *Conseil général* 12th circumscription	20 March 1949	Hadj Brahim Saiah	5,717	Babou	0
(2) Conseil général	15 October 1950	Menoua Saiah	6,089	Mokarnia	3
Algerian Assembly 9th circumscription	15 October 1950	Menouar Saiah	6,074	Mahmoudi	2
legislative elections	17 June 1951	Menouar Saiah	10,225	Mahmoudi	21
Conseil général 11th circumscription	7 October 1951	Abdelkader Saiah	7,697	Marouf	15

Source AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, CM Chelif.

very peaceful rural commune. Order reigns to this day. The contamination of the [modern] age is hardly felt.'[79] To all intents and purposes the 'traditional' patrimonial system of political control of the rural interior by the *grandes familles*, and in particular by the Saiah clan that had been restored after Sétif as the loyalist champion of France, appeared to have entirely recovered through the careful management by the SLNA and Algiers government. Rohrbacher confirmed this re-stabilization through a table of election results for the Chelif region during 1948 to 1951 (see Table 3).

The CM administrators like Rohrbacher and Zannattecci were, however, lulled into a false, and dangerous, sense of security. The votes returned for the communist candidates Marouf, Mokarnia, Babou, and Mahmoudi provide a clear indication of the extent to which government fixing of the elections had become systematized during 1948 to 1951. Equally delusional was the repetition of a standard, official discourse that the vast, illiterate population of the interior constituted a mass of simple peasants who would remain essentially pro-French, as long as they were shielded from the toxic impacts of urban modernity and subversive ideologies. Already, delineated here, was the standard mindset that was to be found among the colonial leaders and the military throughout the Algerian War, one which misinterpreted the revolt as the work of a tiny, unrepresentative

[79] AOM 4i197, *Monographie politique*, du Chelif, 30 December 1952.

minority of 'terrorists' that had imposed themselves on a population that remained essentially pro-French.[80]

The period from 1948 to 1954 was one of a curious political and economic 'immobilism' of rural Algeria, as if nothing was changing, either to relieve the endemic poverty, or to challenge the traditional system of indirect rule by the *caids*. A few high-placed officials and politicians by the eve of the 1954 revolt began to express a sense of powerlessness and frustration at their inability to implement economic reform, the necessity of which seemed evident if a catastrophe was to be avoided.[81] However, most revealing was a CHEAM report submitted by Gérard Bergé, probably an administrator in the CM of Mascara, in which, only one year before the 1954 insurrection, he closely dissected the systematic failings of the *commune mixte* system.

The colonial administration, remarked Bergé, had supported the *grandes familles* in their multiple nominations to the *caidat*, creating an almost 'hereditary' caste that was grossly incompetent, half of them absentee from the *douars* in which they had handed over their key functions to subordinate field guards.[82] The colonial administration had tolerated this abusive system, and was complicit in the expansion of 'fiefdoms', family networks of political and economic power that were unlikely to renounce access to '*l'assiette au beurre*', the state gravy-train. But most damaging of all was the move under Naegelen in April 1948 to arrange what Bergé called the '*élection préfabriquée*' in order to block the nationalist advance. Five years later electoral fraud and the appointment of *caids* as 'administrative' candidates had become the accepted norm, an abusive system which, claimed Bergé, had created a 'dangerous illusion' in which the administration mistook the election results as a true reflection of Algerian opinion. Electoral fraud was less prevalent in the major towns, but widespread in the rural zones, so that the regime was particularly ill-informed or ignorant of the developing situation among the population in the interior.

From 1948 to 1954 the colonial regime remained locked into a fatal paralysis, largely the consequence of conservative European interests that perversely still clung to the illusion that they could maintain their racial dominance. The very moment that the CM administrators in the Chelif thought that the equilibrium of the old system of rural management had been re-established with the April

[80] Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 52–3.

[81] Typical of this disillusionment was a letter from Eirik Labonne, the former Resident General of Morocco in 1946–7, to Robert Montagne, 30 June 1952: ANP, CHEAM papers, 19960480/16. Labonne, whose reforming endeavours had got nowhere, remarked that since 1947 he felt in no position to pass comment on current political change in the Maghreb: 'Allow me to simply observe how much I am surprised and, to be more precise, stupefied, by the paralysis in which we find ourselves.'

[82] G. Bergé, 'Caids et élus en Algérie', 26 October 1953, ANP, 20000046/82. Bergé had the courage to openly challenge the conservative position of Robert Montagne, the respected and influential director of CHEAM.

elections of 1948 coincided with the point in time at which Algerians turned towards the planning of an armed insurrection in the mountains. The impetus of the nationalist and communist penetration into the *douars* had not been broken in 1948–50, but had gone underground to prepare the way for the formation of a peasant-based insurrection.

10
The Nationalists Go Underground

Clandestine Organization in the Ouarsenis Mountains, 1948–54

Until this point most of the investigation of peasant politics has been centred on the Communist Party, as well as on the particular zone of the Dahra, north of the Chelif River, but this chapter in following through the phase of colonial reaction from 1948 to 1954 switches attention to the MTLD-PPA and the massif of the Ouarsenis that would eventually become the most formidable fortress of the FLN guerrilla forces. This pre-insurrectionary penetration of the Ouarsenis is explored in three parts. The first looks at a group of *douars* that I have named here the 'Rouina triangle', located in the piedmont between 8 to 12 miles south-west of Duperré (Map 5).

The *douars* Rouina, Zeddine, Bou Rached, and Oued Ouagenay, were to play an important strategic role in the extension of the Messalist networks into the mountainous interior, but also played host to a special meeting of the PPA Central Committee in December 1948 which accepted a major report on a future peasant-based revolutionary strategy. The second and third parts examine how the nationalists undertook such a programme in the Ouarsenis, by a focus on the mine of Bou Caid and the forestry centre of Teniet el Haad, two small towns high in the central mountains from where the flame of nationalist revolt was carried into some of the most isolated communities.

The Rouina Triangle

Between 1926 and 1946 the major nationalist movement led by Messali Hadj, the *Parti du peuple algérien* (PPA) and its later legal façade the *Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques* (MTLD), was primarily an urban-based organization that paid little attention to spreading its influence among the peasantry, a situation that changed dramatically during 1947 and 1948 with the creation of the *Organisation spéciale* (OS), a secret, paramilitary body that began to prepare a rural-based revolution.

The events in Sétif on 8 May 1945, that triggered a spontaneous and unplanned peasant insurrection that was quickly crushed by colonial forces, brought home to

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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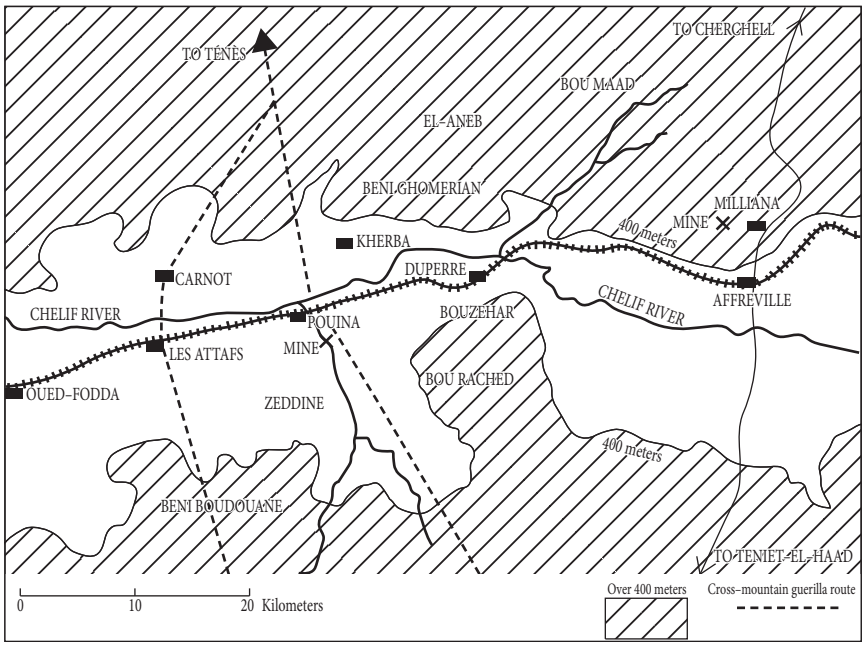

Map 5 The Duperré region. Mapping Peter Gibbs.

the PPA that it needed to move beyond the traditional forms of *jacquerie* that historically had seen peasants armed with axes, sticks, and shotguns, decimated by modern forces. The disasters of May 1945, which had severely damaged the PPA organization, was not lost on a radical section of the Messalist movement as it turned in 1947–8 to reject reformism for a strategy of peasant-based insurrection. A secret congress of the PPA held on 15 February 1947 in the Algiers district of Belcourt voted to form the top-secret paramilitary *Organisation spéciale* (OS) and to prepare plans for an insurrection.[1] This was a momentous turning point since it set the nationalists on the path to an armed revolt, and at the same time determined that this would extend beyond the urban centres, in which the PPA structures were currently rooted, to include peasant-based guerrilla forces operating from mountain bastions. This strategy was later confirmed at a special meeting of the Central Committee held in the Belhadj farmhouse of the *douar* Zeddine in December 1948 when the Kabyle Ait Ahmed presented a detailed report on a peasant-based revolutionary strategy.

That the Rouina-Zeddine area in the foothills of the Ouarsenis was to play such a key national role in the elaboration of both the policy and the experimental testing of a peasant strategy was not coincidental. In his *Monographie politique* of

[1] H. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 92–9.

1953 the administrator L. Olive, in an overview of the CM of Braz, provided a detailed picture of the local MTLD-PPA organization in which he identified Djilali Belhadj of Zeddine and Mohammed Maroc of Rouina as the most important and influential leaders.[2] By 1948 the Messalist organization in Algeria was divided into three separate tiers, the MTLD that constituted the legal façade of the party, the militant PPA structure that operated in a twilight, semi-clandestine way, and the recently formed, top-secret paramilitary *Organisation spéciale*. The police and intelligence services had great difficulty, even with the aid of informers, in penetrating and identifying this complex structure, and the archives today reflect this fragmentary picture, but the CM administrator was able to piece together a detailed analysis of the public face of the MTLD in the Braz, the tip of the iceberg of a much larger clandestine organization that reached from the urban centres into the mountainous interior.

The MTLD was organized nationally in 1947 following a classic pyramidal structure, one drawn initially by migrant workers from the French Communist Party. In this the National Council in Algiers stood at the summit of the *wilaya* zones, subdivided into *daira* (regions), *kasma* (sectors), and cells of three to five militants. From 1947 to 1950, when the OS was uncovered, Maroc played a key role in the activities of the Miliana MTLD that included a mix of dynamic young *medersa* and lycée-educated militants like Maroc, Braham Bouzar,[3] and Mustapha Ferrouki,[4] alongside older professionals like the lawyer Mohammed Ghersi,[5] and a more plebeian class of artisans and labourers, among them five gardeners, a hairdresser, miner, and shopkeeper.

Maroc, as head of the *daira* that covered the area between Oued Fodda and Affreville, was responsible for extending the PPA organization into the rural areas, and in this he was able to work closely with the MTLD section in Duperré which

[2] AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM Braz, 15 February 1953. Mohammed Maroc, whose father was a miner, was born in Rouina 8 May 1922; after passing the baccalaureat he was employed in the CM of Braz, Duperré, until sacked for membership of the MTLD in 1946. A radio engineer, and member of the OS *Conseil supérieur*, he was in charge of radio transmission and engineering. Condemned to six years in prison in 1950, he went underground, and after 1 November 1954 was a member of the MNA Political Bureau, until arrested in December 1956. His younger brother Hocine Maroc, who went to France in 1954, was a trade union and MNA militant, and was assassinated by an FLN commando 24 September 1957: B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 113, 212–14.

[3] Braham Bouzar was employed, along with Maroc, in the bureaux of the *commune mixte* of Braz, which provides further evidence of the extent to which the nationalists permeated the ranks of local government, perfectly understood its functions, and were able to supply inside intelligence. Bouzar, like Djillali Belhadj, was later to turn police informer.

[4] Mustapha Ferrouki, born in Miliana in 1922, a member of the MTLD Central Committee and elected member of the Algerian Assembly in April 1948, frequently campaigned in Duperré and the surrounding *douars* as a leading advocate of the *Front algérien* that worked to unite the PCA, MTLD, UDMA, and *Ulema*: see B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 284; *El Moudjahid*, 9 October 2016, online at <http://www.elmoudjahid.com.fr/actualites/100203>.

[5] Mohammed Ghersi, born in Orleansville in 1913, was identified by Olive as the shadowy key organizer in Miliana. He was a member of the MTLD *Conseil national* and elected in September 1947 vice president of the *Comité directeur*: see B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 240.

had particularly close ties to the Zeddine area through the figures of the vice president Mohammed Belhadj and Abdelkader ben Larbi Bouabdallah ('Djillali'), who was born in the *douar* in 1917. In January 1948 the latter, although described as deputy treasurer, was identified by the police as the key organizer in the town, and a 'very dangerous propagandist'.[6] By 1953 Bouabdallah had established close ties with Ferroukhi and the two were building up an organization that reached out from Miliana and Duperré into the surrounding peasant zones, especially the *douar* of Bou Rached, which was also a centre of communist activity.[7] When peasant militants from the outlying *douars* of Bou Rached, Beni Ghomeriane, and elsewhere came into Duperré on market day they met in Bouabdallah's house, where clandestine night-time meetings were held, and it was from there during elections that agents were sent out with instructions to the rural ballot stations.[8]

The Rouina triangle provided a particularly important bridge from the urban Messalist organization into the piedmont zone, and beyond that into the high Ouarsenis and Dahra mountains. The marked growth of the Rouina area as a particularly dynamic zone of nationalist activity derived, in part, from the proximity to the iron mine that served as a major centre of trade union activism. But, in addition, as the administrator Olive remarked with prescience, Rouina was located in an almost ideal strategic geo-political position for clandestine operations that branched out into the mountains. Policing, noted Olive, was weak in the absence of a gendarmerie and JP, and the mayor, two field guards, and a politically unreliable *caid* were not up to the task. Rouina 'had become a den of nationalism', and would always, 'provide an outstanding location for an HQ through its geographical position on the RN 4, the Algiers to Oran railway, and the departure point for the tracks that give access to the forests of Teniet el Haad, and from near Carnot to Dupleix and the sea'. The township provided both easy and rapid communication by which activists could travel by road and rail to Orleansville, Miliana, Algiers, and elsewhere, but was also at the crossroads of the mule tracks that went southwards into the high Ouarsenis, or north across a ford on the Chelif River towards the *douar* Chemla and tracks leading into the central Dahra and the coast (see Map 5).[9]

[6] AOM 4i199, report of PRG of Miliana, 22 January 1948. Bouabdallah was president of the Duperré scouts (SMA) that provided a training ground for the paramilitary organization.

[7] AOM 91/5Q/138, report of PRG of Miliana, 2 December 1955. The report noted of the *douars* of Bou Rached, Zeddine, and Rouina, 'in these regions where the communist militants are often mixed up with those from the ex-PPA-MTLD movement, the separatist organizations have always had numerous followers'.

[8] AOM 4i199, extract from *Monographie*, CM des Braz, 7 December 1953. During elections national MTLD speakers from Algiers and Blida frequently adressed meetings in Duperré, and 'their speeches are then reproduced in the *douars* where they are commented on and developed'.

[9] The communist Red Maquis created in April 1956 followed an almost identical north-south route connecting the Ouarsenis and the Dahra through mule tracks that crossed the Chelif plain at the Attafs, about seven miles to the west of Rouina.

The Rouina zone was to play a particularly important role in the paramilitary *Organisation spéciale* (OS) that was created in February 1947. Maroc and Belhadj were members of the eight-man *Conseil supérieur* of the OS that first met on 13 November 1947, the first responsible for radio transmissions and the second for paramilitary training. At least two other militants from Rouina, Abdallah Mahdjoub and Abdelkader Boumediene, played a key role in the OS.[10]

In 1948 the Dahra mountains were selected by the OS as a massif that offered an excellent potential as the base for a future maquis and on 19 August a group of eight OS leaders, among them two future presidents of Algeria, Ahmed Ben Bella and Mohammed Boudiaf, arrived by bus in the small coastal town of Novi to carry out a reconnaissance of the Dahra (see Map 1, p. 2).[11] The eight, with an average age of 26, represented the young 'activist' wing of the PPA, which militated to move beyond the cautious, electoral phase of Messalism to prepare for a 'revolutionary war', and which subsequently came to form the core of the breakaway FLN revolt on 1 November 1954. Equipped with tents and rucksacks the group, under the guise of a scout hiking unit, spent three days in a north-south traverse across the high limestone mountains, from the Mediterranean coast to Duperré in the Chelif valley, an experience that was intended to bring them into contact with the impoverished Berber hillsmen and to give the urban leaders a taste of the harsh reality of the conditions that would be faced in a 'partisan war'.[12] The identification of the Chelif region as an ideal location for a future guerrilla HQ led to further detailed strategic investigation by Said Akli and Belhadj Bouchaib, who were sent on mission into the Dahra and Ouarsenis in September and October 1948 to investigate local conditions.[13] OS agents through contacts in the local administration and police, and from ordnance maps and official documents on the

[10] Abdallah Ben Mahdjoub, ['Bec de Lièvre'], born in Rouina, a hairdresser, was an OS activist, arrested in 1950, released in late 1953, and by 1955 was MNA leader for *douars* in the Duperré area, but soon rallied to the FLN, and played a significant role in the integration of the PCA *maquis* into the ALN; AOM 4i206, Orleansville PRG, 2 November 1955. Abdallah's younger brother Omar, who joined the PPA at age 16 in 1943, was also involved in the OS and was given a prison sentence of four years in 1950, sharing a cell with Ben Bella. After joining the *maquis* in 1955 he headed a group in the *douar* Tacheta. The corpses of two younger brothers Djillali and Slimane, killed by French soldiers, were displayed in the marketplace at Rouina; S. Kastell, *Le Maquis Rouge*, 227. Abdelkader Boumediene, born in Rouina, worked closely with Abdallah Ben Mahdjoub in the specialist section ('*complicité*'), that created a network of safe houses for militants on the run and in September–October 1949 concealed two Kabyles in Rouina wanted for the hold-up of the Oran post office. He was arrested in 1950. AOM 1K/241, SLNA monthly bulletin, May 1950; AOM 1K/349, monthly report sub-prefect Orleansville, July 1954.

[11] H. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 150–1. On the eight men, see the biographical entries in B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*: Hocine Ait Ahmed (p. 269), Djilali Belhadj (p. 194), Ahmed Ben Bella (pp. 271–2), Mohammed Boudiaf (pp. 326–7), Ahmed Mahsas (pp. 291–2), Djilali Reguimi (p. 301), Mohammed Maroc (pp. 212–14), Amar Ould Hamouda (p. 300).

[12] The following year Jean Servier, on his first expedition as an ethnologist, traversed the Dahra in the opposition direction from Miliana to Francis Garnier on the coast; see his account in *Dans l'Aurès*, 31–77, 'La première piste'. His traverse can be found on Map 1 (p. 000).

[13] H. Ait-Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 154, 167. On Said Akli and Belhadj Bouchaib, see B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 165–6, 326.

regional economy and security forces, prepared '*Plan Vert*', a global strategy for insurrection that, although aborted by the mass OS arrests of 1950, laid the basis for the future 1954 insurrection.

The careful preparation for a peasant-based guerrilla war fed in to a remarkable report that was presented by Ait Ahmed in December 1948 at a special meeting of the PPA Central Committee that was hosted by the Belhadj family and entertained with a lavish gastronomic display of Algerian regional cuisine.[14] The report, one of the most radical documents produced by the Messalist movement, showed an outstanding theoretical and pragmatic grasp of the complex, geo-political issues faced by insurrectionary movements in both Algeria and the wider Maghreb.

Ait Ahmed, who descended from a famous *marabout* family in Kabylia, was speaking from a deep personal experience of the realities of peasant life. The future revolution, Ait Ahmed reported to the Central Committee, should not consist of the 'tragic adventurism' of the kind seen in May 1945, nor of isolated or individual acts of terrorism, but of a carefully planned partisan war in which a trained vanguard would work hand in hand with peasant masses that had been politically mobilized. But in an autocritique of the PPA he claimed that the party had largely failed in its organizational work among the rural population:

> Our structures have not penetrated at all the rural masses of some regions and remain urban and petite-bourgeoise. . . . We need to make good these gaps and to work our way into the depths of our rural masses. Revolutionary patriotism is to be found in the countryside; the poor peasants, the *khammès* peasants, the small peasants, will constitute the driving force of the war of liberation.[15]

In an analysis that was precursory of the thinking of Mostepha Lacheraf and Frantz Fanon a decade later, Ait Ahmed suggested that the revolutionary organization should respect, and work along the grain, of traditional rural structures and customs by, for example, taking advantage of local élites, 'of the influence of the notables won to the movement in order to structure the peasants'.[16] For this reason, he claimed, it would be preferable to recruit young militants and students of rural origin to carry out organizational work in the countryside since they were sensitive to the cultural values of peasant life. 'The peasants prefer cadres from the locality, they need to have trust in order to join up'.[17] Ait-Ahmed's report was unanimously voted by the fifty delegates present at Zeddine, apart from the

[14] A copy of this important text can be found in Mohammed Harbi (ed.), *Les archives de la révolution algérienne* (Algiers: Éditions Dahlab, 2010), 15–49. Harbi later discovered, *L'Algérie et son destin*, 19, that the document had been amended at a later stage, but without significant distortion of the original. It seems likely that H. Ait Ahmed was the source of the 'polished' text that was published by Harbi. M. Harbi, *Le FLN mirage et réalité, des origines à la prise du pouvoir (1945–1962)* (Paris: Éditions J. A., 1985 edn), 47–53, provides a further analysis of the report.

[15] M. Harbi (ed.), *Les archives*, 27, 36.

[16] M. Harbi (ed.), *Les archives*, 37.

[17] M. Harbi (ed.), *Les archives*, 39.

Constantinois deputy Djamal Derdour and one abstention, rather ominously that of the president Messali Hadj.[18]

The mid-Chelif region thus played a prominent part in the early development of a national Messalist programme for a peasant-based revolutionary war, and, at least on paper, the PPA was far in advance of the PCA on this question. The Messalists were, by 1950, moving towards a position where the insurrection may well have been triggered then, rather than four years later, but a number of factors intervened to break the impetus. In March 1950 an OS commando in the Constantinois detained a suspect informer, Abdelkader Khiari, who managed to escape and to alert the police. This led to the discovery of the entire national OS organization and to the arrest of some four hundred members, including Djillali Belhadj, while other militants from the Chelif region escaped and went underground, among them Mohammed Maroc and the miner Djillali Bounaama.[19] The leadership of the MTLD, the legal face of the Messalist movement, disclaimed any links to the OS, but suffered from an inevitable wave of police investigation and repression.[20]

The dissolution of the OS, which was accompanied by mammoth showcase trials of hundreds of militants in Bône, Bougie, and Blida, meant disruption of a sophisticated organization that was far advanced in its planning of a rural-based guerrilla.[21] The dislocation of the OS coincided with one of deepening internal division in the MTLD that resulted from the 'Berberist' crisis of 1949, which saw the marginalization or expulsion of supposedly 'Marxist' and secularist elements, some of whom defected to the PCA.[22] This was followed by the emergence of complex shifting alliances in opposition to the domination of Messali Hadj, and

[18] H. Ait Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 157.

[19] The fullest treatment of the OS organization is O. Carlier, *Entre nation*, ch. 9, 269–308; see also, M. Kaddache, *Histoire*, 2.854–64; H. Ait-Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 125–75; M. Harbi, *Le FLN mirage*, 69–77; Henri Alleg et al. (eds), *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Temps Actuels, 1981), 1.345–61. Harbi estimates the total OS membership as 1,000 to 1,500, Ait-Ahmed gives a figure of 2,000, while Kaddache estimates that about 400 were arrested from a total of 3,000. The OS still awaits detailed investigation by historians but much evidence can be found in police reports that, after the mass arrests of 1950, were able to use a considerable volume of information extracted from prisoners, some of it under torture, to reconstruct the global OS organization; see in particular, AOM 1K/241, SLNA monthly bulletin for May 1950, pp. 8–19. The report claims that the key national leaders from the Chelif that had been arrested, among them Djillali Belhadj, Mohammed Ben Mahdjoub, and Mohammed Arab, 'had made full confessions', as had Ben Bella.

[20] AOM 1K/241, SLNA monthly bulletin, May 1950, indicates that Djilali Belhadj had moved his family to Algiers where he created a front company, the *Sociétés d'importation de représentation et d'exploitation commerciale* (SIREC) for the import of war materials and set up, with Mohammed Arab, a laboratory for the manufacture of grenades made from metal tubes, or what would today be called improvised explosive devices (IEDs). While in prison Belhadj was recruited by the French as an informer.

[21] On the OS trials, see Sharon Elbaz, 'L'avocat et sa cause en milieu colonial. La défense politique dans le procès de l'Organisation spéciale du mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés en Algérie (1950–1952)', *Politix* 16.62 (2003), 65–91.

[22] M. Harbi, *Le FLN mirage*, 59–67.

which culminated in the formation of the break-away CRUA (*Comité révolutionnaire d'unité et d'action*) in April 1954, from which the FLN emerged, after a meeting of the 'Committee of 22' in Algiers in July 1954. The divisions within the nationalist ranks continued into the War of Independence with the fratricidal conflict between the MNA and FLN, a bitter and obscure civil war that we return to later.[23]

The complex internal crisis of Messalism from 1949 to 1954, along with the deep clandestinity of the movement in response to unprecedented levels of police surveillance and repression, means that the historic record of the PPA-OS penetration into the rural Chelif is sparse and fragmentary.[24] However, despite the mass arrests of 1950 the MTLD-PPA continued, like the PCA, to extend its networks into the interior, often through urban flying units ('*meetings volantes*'), that moved too fast to allow informers and the police to close in on them.[25] A letter from the Governor General in December 1950 noted that the MTLD-PPA had resumed its particular focus on rural society, and was adapting its style of propaganda to the religious beliefs of the peasantry:

> The emissaries, most of them from the towns and dressed for the occasion in a *burnous* and turban, leave the urban zones in the late afternoon and arrive by car in the *douars* as night falls. The meetings are held in the Arab cafés, shops, etc. . . . and even in the open. Placing a strong emphasis on the religious character of their intentions, the speakers develop the usual propaganda themes of their party and comment at length on the events of Indochina. To those in the audience who raise the question of arms for any direct action, some have replied, 'he who invites you to a meal is obliged to supply you with spoons'.[26]

The next section turns to look at the way in which the syndicalist and Messalist movements were able to find a bridgehead into the very heart of the Ouarsenis massif through the mining centre at Bou Caid near Molière.

[23] The history of the Messalist movement was largely expunged in Algerian official and public memory until the research of Benjamin Stora; see his influential biography, *Messali Hadj*. More recently Nedjib Sidi Moussa has begun to move beyond the figure of Messali Hadj to pay close attention to the socio-political history of the MNA party; see 'Devenirs Messalistes (1925–2013). Sociologie historique d'une aristocratie révolutionnaire', doctoral thesis in political science, University of Paris 1, 2013.

[24] AOM 1K/349, sub-prefect of Miliana, monthly report for April 1954, described the crippling impact of the internal crisis on local militant activism: 'It seems likely that the internal disagreements of the PPA have disorganized the only fortress of Muslim nationalism of any substance and prevented the terrorist movement from reaching our region.'

[25] M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 90.

[26] Governor General to prefect of Algiers, 16 December 1950, cited in Mohammed Teguia, 'L'Algérie en guerre: 1954–62. Foyers, bases et conduites de la lutte d'Indépendance. D'une étude régionale à une contribution à l'histoire de l'interieur', History Thesis, Paris 8 (1974), 604, app.

The Peasant Proletariat of the Mines

Within the Chelif region the six mines of Zaccar, Rouina, Breira, Beni Akil, Gouraya, and Bou Caid all played a particularly important role in the diffusion of communism and nationalism into rural society and in the later elaboration of a guerrilla movement. A distinction can be made between two types of peasant miners, those from families that had migrated permanently down to the plain and constituted a proletariat that inhabited *bidonvilles* and *gourbis* on the perimeter of the centres of Rouina and Miliana. A second type, which can be termed the peasant proletariat, walked daily into the mines, but retained their base on tiny plots of land, and continued to work the farm as a joint family enterprise in which mine wages were combined with a subsistence income. As we have seen (Chapter 2), in contrast to those peasants that lived in the piedmont and travelled daily on foot or by cycle to work in the towns or in the advanced agricultural sector of the plain, those that lived isolated in the central zones of the Dahra and Ouarsenis, apart from seasonal harvest labour, tended to become trapped into a process of economic involution and a desperate intensification of existing subsistence agro-pastoralism on the borders of the forests. The Ouarsenis peasants, unlike the Kabyles that found a safety valve for demographic pressure through emigration and commerce, had very low levels of labour migration in the 1950s, and had become increasingly dependent on the state provision of emergency food supplies and public works on road and terrace construction. The isolation of the mountain peasants from outside contact, that was carefully nurtured by the *caids* and police, meant that the nationalists faced a particularly difficult task in attempting to extend their organizations into the interior. However, a number of mines, in particular those of Bou Caid and Breira, were located in the mountainous interior and, through the recruitment of a peasant-proletariat from the surrounding *douars*, provided a remarkable point of contact between urban-based party and trade union organizations, and the isolated societies of the interior.[27]

This form of proto-industrial, mixed labour is in general well known to historians of European industrialization who have remarked on the extent to which peasants who walked daily to labour in mines or factories, through contact with trade unionism and socialism, frequently became highly radicalized. For example, the peasants of the Cantabrian mountains in Asturias that worked as '*obrero mixto*' in the coal mines and steelworks of the Nalón River constituted a

[27] For a study of the '*ouvrier-paysan*' at the mine of Timizrat in Kabylie, which faced similar conditions and became involved in long, bitter strikes during 1952–4, which were supported by the village *djemâa*, see Azzedine Kinzi, 'La mine de Timezrit. Histoire sociale des At Yemmel en Kabylie 1902–1976', in F. Colonna and L. Le Pape (eds), *Traces*, 157–8; R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 164–5.

highly politicized force that played a key role in the insurrection of 1934 and the Spanish Civil War.[28]

Before looking more closely at the Bou Caid mine as the outstanding example of this pattern, I turn first to the important iron mine of Zaccar near Miliana since, as the main centre of CGT and communist activism, it had a major impact throughout the region. The Zaccar mine was located on steep, rocky slopes close to the ancient city of Miliana, which were penetrated by a warren of tunnels from which extracted haematite was loaded into train wagons and exported via the port of Algiers. At its peak there may have been up to 1,800 men in the mine, a mix of specialist European workers, train drivers, engineers, foundry-men, foremen, and others, and low paid Algerian and Moroccan labourers. This ethnically diverse body, which thronged the cafés of Miliana, composed a classic proletarian and militant urban society in which the trade union movement and Communist Party found a particularly strong base.[29] The social conditions of this working-class community were described in the earliest French-language novel by an Algerian, Adelkader Hadj-Hamou's 1925 work, *Zohra, la femme du mineur*.[30]

As the Zaccar mine expanded after 1904 increasing numbers of peasants moved from the surrounding *douars* to settle in the suburbs of the town where they rented or bought plots of land to build *gourbis* and to tend vegetables and fruit in irrigated gardens.[31] The miners, who were radicalized by the CGT, kept family ties with the rural interior and this may explain why they were so prepared to act as shock troops who turned out in their hundreds to support the PCA and PPA electoral campaigns in the surrounding *douars*. Mohamed Bencherif, the CGT miner's union, led a series of strikes during the late 1940s and early 1950s. One of these in November 1947, which coincided with the *djemâa* elections, led to the sacking of six hundred Algerian workers.[32]

[28] David Ruiz, *El movimiento obrero en Asturias* (Madrid: Júcar, 1979); Adrian Shubert, *The Road to Revolution: The Coal Miners of Asturias 1860–1934* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). A similar type of peasant proletariat can be found for example in the French Alps, the Cevennes, and Lorraine: see Raymond A. Jones, *Industry and Politics in Rural France: Peasants of the Isère, 1870–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Gérard Noiriel, *Longwy. Immigrés et prolétaires 1880–1980* (Paris: PUF, 1984); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Glassmakers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth-century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[29] The communist journalist René Duvalet, 'Listening to the Miners of Miliana', *Liberté*, 25 December 1952, described a meeting of a strike committee: 'Their faces are emaciated and pale, but their eyes speak awareness of their struggle.' Duvalet visited the company lodging houses where the miner Othman lived with his four children in one room, without running water, electricity, or sanitation.

[30] Abdelkader Hadj-Hamou, *Zohra, la femme du mineur* (Paris: Les Editions du Monde Moderne, 1925: reprinted Oran: Éditions Dar El Gharb, 2007). Hadj-Hamou, who came from a family of Miliana notables and jurists, was a conservative and stood in the 1919 municipal elections against the '*Jeunes algériens*' of Emir Khaled. The novel is centred on the tragic history of the miner Méliani who was led away from the path of Islam to ruin by the café and alcohol.

[31] André Prenant and Henry Delannoy, 'Les jardins de Miliana (Algérie): effets de la prolétarisation d'une banlieue maraîchère et fruitière', *Bulletin de l'association de géographes français* 316–17 (1963), 1–23. In 1948 a third of Algerians in work in the radical suburb of Annasser were miners.

[32] N. Bennalègue-Chaouia, *Algérie*, 391.

Ten years later the Zaccar was to become a source of major concern to the security services as a centre of FLN activity and, in particular through the supply of explosives that were expertly converted to IEDS by the miners. The full extent of the miner's clandestine networks became fully apparent during the period from April to June 1957 as the secret service (DST), working with the police and gendarmes, uncovered extensive organizations based in the Zaccar and Rouina mines. In April the security services arrested a network of fifty-three miners, headed by Abdelkader Benamara, that over a period of five months had managed to steal three tons of explosives, detonators, and Bickford fuses from the Zaccar mine.[33] During June 1957 the intelligence services investigated a second network in the Rouina mine that led to the arrest of a further twenty-six men who had, in addition to theft of explosives, carried out assassinations, attacked and burned farmhouses, and sabotaged the railway line.[34]

By contrast the Bou Caid zinc mine was located in the central mountains close to the small administrative centre of Molière on the RN 19, one of only two metalled roads that traversed the Ouarsenis massif to Vialar. The Belgian-owned *Société des mines de la Vieille-Montagne* employed a European staff of managers, engineers, supervisors, and workers of Italian and Spanish origin, who were paid higher rates than the Algerians, who were relegated to the most back-breaking work in underground galleries and in the washing and sorting plant (*triage*).[35] In 1931 a European miner at Bou Caid gained on average 26.90 francs per day, about three times more than an Algerian miner (9.33 fr).[36] The working conditions were harsh and dangerous, safety regulation lax, the equipment and methods used were archaic, and children were employed in the washing plant.[37] The mine company was able to draw on peasant workers as a reservoir of cheap labour and wages could be kept artificially low since farmers could fall back on the safety net of the

[33] *L'Echo d'Alger*, 13 April, 26 April 1957. AOM 9140/175, minutes of the joint civil and military *État-major mixte* of Orleansville, 2 and 23 March, 3 August, and 21 November 1957 indicate how the authorities continued to be exercised by their inability to find a solution to the problem of security in two explosive manufactures (Pyraf, Socalex) and the mines of Bou Caid, Breira, Rouina, and Zaccar. A working party, the *Groupe de travail mixte départemental*, was unable to find a solution, and a plan to replace explosive stores in each mine by a central depot had to be abandoned. The *État-major* decided to place informers in the workforce, but the director of the Zaccar mine was un-cooperative in introducing internal security checks, perhaps an indication that management, as in the sister mine at Timezrit, was sympathetic to the nationalists: see A. Kinzi, 'La mine', 174.

[34] AOM Algérie 9140/78, fortnightly reports of prefect of Orleansville on '*Opération Pilote*', 13–24 May, 13–29 June 1957.

[35] In 1890 the Belgian company, the oldest and biggest zinc producer in the world with interests from Sweden, England, and France to Spain, Italy, and Tunisia, received a concession to mine 2,559 hectares in the central Ouarsenis.

[36] N. Benallègue-Chaouia, *Algérie*, 55–7. At Rouina in 1931 an Algerian miner earned 16 francs per day, a European miner 27 francs, although often classified as a 'specialist' to gain 48 francs: *Exposé de la situation de l'Algérie par M. le Gouverneur général*, 1931, 42.

[37] D. Dussert and G. Bétier, *Les mines et les carrières en Algérie* (Paris: Larose, 1932), 265–7.

subsistence farm, especially during the 1930s when they were laid off during periods of recession.[38]

The mines of the Chelif provided an ideal terrain for the trade union leaders Mohammed Marouf and Pierre Fayet, who were ideologically focused on the revolutionary potential of the industrial proletariat (Chapter 7). The police files contain frequent references, especially during and after the Popular Front period, to their organizational work at both Breira and Bou Caid. During a wave of strikes that spread across Algeria in the summer of 1936 Marouf organized a stoppage among the five hundred miners of Bou Caid that met with a strong reaction by the authorities, who sent in the *gendarmerie mobile* to retake the mine.[39] Further actions by Marouf followed at Bou Caid through 1938 and 1939, with demands for better wages, increased family benefits, and other social welfare rights that had been won by the Matignon accords of the Popular Front.[40] At the Breira mines on 27 July 1939 the sub-prefect of Orleansville intervened personally with a company of eleven gendarmes to prevent CGT militants forcing a group of twenty-five miners to join the union and support a strike.[41] This intense level of intervention by Marouf and Fayet was resumed after the Vichy period, during which many communists died in prison or Saharan camps, and culminated in a particularly long and bitter strike at Bou Caid and Zaccar in late 1952.

Bou Caid and the adjacent centre of Molière provided an urban centre, located high in the central Ouarsenis, from where the economic, social, and political influences of the mine spread in a radius into the surrounding *douars*, some of the most isolated mountain communities. We have an unusually rich and detailed insight into how the mine impacted on the agro-pastoralists of the Ouarsenis, and prepared the ground for the later development of nationalist organizations, through the work of the anthropologist Jacques Lizot, who carried out fieldwork during 1963–4 and 1966 in Metidja, one of the fractions of the *douar* of Beni Hindel, located two hours walking distance north-east of the Bou Caid mine. The miner El Hadj, for example, who began work in about 1936–7 on a daily wage of 3.05 francs, set off from his farm at six in the morning, and walked for two hours up a steep path high into the flank of Sidi Amar massif, arriving at 8 am. After an eight hour day, he left the mine at 4 pm. arriving back home at 6 pm.[42] The fact that the men of Metidja were prepared to walk a total of four hours or more every

[38] D. Lefeuvre, *Chère Algérie*, 42–9, on the crisis in Algerian mining during the depression when production of iron ore fell from over two million tons in 1929 to under half a million in 1932.

[39] R. Gallissot, *Algérie colonisée*, 108–9. Likewise in August 1938 Marouf held open-air meetings with the miners of Breira and Cap Kala near Ténès where a cell helped agricultural workers to carry out strikes during the grape harvest; AOM 4i206, report by sub-prefect of Orleansville, August 1938.

[40] AOM 4i206, Orleansville police reports, 2 August 1938 and 27 May 1939.

[41] AOM 4i206, the sub-prefect in a report to the prefect of Algiers, 28 July 1939, thought Marouf was behind the tensions, and that the peasant-workers had been misled into such action by the mistaken belief that the mine was so isolated as to escape intervention by the authorities.

[42] J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 59; *Liberté*, 30 October 1952, reported that some miners walked even further, three hours in each direction.

day through the mountains to seek waged labour was an indication of the desperate poverty of peasant households that were unable to survive from the tiny and fragmented parcels of land which they owned.[43]

The miners, with the assistance of family labour, eked out their low wages by cultivating micro-plots and keeping a few sheep or goats that were grazed in the forest, despite constant conflict with the guards. Lizot, using oral sources, provides an insight into the lives of miners who, while still inhabiting the traditional social and cultural universe of the peasant, were at the same time transformed by their experience of wage labour, clock time, industrial capitalism, and militant trade unionism that introduced them to the concept of the minimum wage, the forty-hour week, family allowances, and pensions. Here are three typical biographies:

(1) Kouider ben Abdelkader, born in Metidja in 1919, illiterate and without any education, guarded goats in the forest until he went into the *triage* plant at the mine at the age of 18 in 1937. After serving three years in the French army, including action in the Italian campaign, he rejoined the mine and participated in the bitter 1952 lockout. Fired by the mine Kouider was forced to find work in Algiers, where he was located on the outbreak of the 1954 insurrection; but, in his absence, his wife provided refuge for ALN guerrilla forces in the family *mechta*.

(2) Ahmed ben Djilali, born in Metidja in 1941, came from a family of miners, including his father, his uncles, and his two older brothers, Said and Mohamed, who lived together as an extended family group. They worked in common a tiny farm of 0.76 hectares that was scattered in nineteen micro-plots, and owned one cow. Said, who was married with two children, joined the maquis of *wilaya* 4 where he was a combatant and later a nurse. The second brother Mohamed also joined the ALN and was taken prisoner by the French army.

(3) Abdelkader ben Boumedien, born in Metidja in 1934, guarded the family goats when little, before entering the mine in 1948, where he stayed for four years before finding work in Oran. When he finished his military service in 1958 his father and brother were already in the maquis, which he joined as a liaison agent, able to put his close knowledge of the tracks and hiding places of the Ouarsenis to good use. He also constructed underground caches or bunkers for food stocks, arms, and wounded fighters. Severely wounded in the shoulder during an engagement with the French army he managed to hide up for three months in winter close to the mine workings, and eventually reached a clandestine medical centre. At the end of the war he survived on his pension and by working a micro-farm of 0.40 hectares, divided into six parcels, on which he kept a cow, a calf, and three goats.

[43] J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 56; the total arable land in Metidja of 143 hectares was divided between ninety-two households, an average of 1.55 hectares per family, when 10 hectares was the minimum required for basic subsistence.

The managers of the Bou Caid mine preferred to recruit mine workers from among the relatives of men who were already employed there, and in Metidja by the early 1950s there were families that had several generations of miners who had become syndicalized by Marouf and other CGT militants for over twenty years. Through the CGT, which campaigned constantly for the full extension of the French legislation on the minimum wage, family allowances, pensions, paid holidays, and healthcare to Algerian workers, the peasant miners became acutely aware of their extreme poverty and the extent to which their communities had been largely abandoned by the colonial welfare state.[44]

The administrator of the newly formed CM of Ouarsenis, Nicolle, who was located at Molière, reported that by early 1952, 'The Communist Party organizes most of the Algerian mine workers of the *Société de la Vieille Montagne*'.[45] Nicolle was deeply concerned by the CGT militants who threatened to propagandize and destabilize what he described as the simple and 'primitive' peasantry located in the heart of an, 'isolated mountain massif far removed from the main lines of communication'. Police surveillance was crucially about maintaining a constant watch to identify any dangerous propagandists, strangers, travelling salesmen, and lorry drivers, who might be conveying the microbe of insurrection into the mountainous interior. Nicolle and the gendarmes of Molière were particularly concerned that the miners offered a potential force of politicized militants, well organized through the structures of the trade union, that could form the backbone of a revolutionary movement.

The administrator estimated an increase in Communist Party membership at Bou Caid from two hundred workers in January 1952, to six hundred in March 1953, that he ascribed to the bitter five months strike of 1952. 'The PCA has in effect exploited the situation very skillfully by inserting well trained cadres and intensifying its propaganda drive.'[46] The communists were totally dominant in the mine: 'The actions of this party [PCA] are all the more dangerous because no alternative workers' organisation exists to counter the operations of the communist CGT', and presented a serious revolutionary threat since it had at its disposal, 'a well-trained and disciplined shock troop of which the nationalist and anti-French sentiments cannot be doubted'.

However, Nicolle failed to recognize the extent to which the CGT did not represent a communist hegemony since the Messalists, in the absence of their own

[44] Jeanne Favret, Lizot's director of research, used his findings on Metidja as part of the empirical data for her influential essay, 'Le traditionalism par excès de modernité' (see Chapter 2, p. 40, n. 25). The insurrectionary radicalism of the modern peasantry, she argued, derived less from a drive to remove the hand of the state, as from the opposite, a demand for more state aid. This sits well with Frederick Cooper's thesis that the militancy of post-war African workers derived from the failed promises of colonial developmentalism and a sense of entitlement.

[45] AOM 4i206, P. Nicolle, *Monographie politique*, CM de l'Ouarsenis., 1 March 1953. The CM of the Ouarsenis was formed from a subdivision of the CM of Chelif.

[46] AOM 4i206, P. Nicolle, *Monographie politique*, CM de l'Ouarsenis, 1 March 1953.

central trade union federation, tended to operate in a clandestine way under the cover of the CGT. The communist union was dominant in almost every sector of the Algerian economy, and possessed a superb organization and expert cadres that exerted a huge influence through its modern press, training schools, and financial resources that procured offices, telephones, vehicles, duplicating machines, and type writers.[47] The MTLD encouraged its militants to join the CGT and to actively seek out union positions so that they could receive a high level of organizational experience, and a solid political and ideological formation.[48] Hocine Ait Ahmed told the secret meeting of the Central Committee at Zeddine in December 1948: 'We must undertake a discreet but deep penetration of the CGT by an infiltration [*noyautage*] of the organization.'[49] The situation at Bou Caid confirms the extent to which at the grassroots level the bulkheads between nationalists and communists, which historians often describe at the national level, were less solid than assumed, and there often existed a 'messy' fluidity and interchange of personnel and ideas that did not always conform to the bitter FLN-PCA divisions that marked the party leadership, and that has been so much emphasized by historians.

The most important nationalist figure to emerge from the turbulent conditions in the Bou Caid mine was Djilali Bounamaa, who was later to become the ALN commander ('Si Mohammed') of the Algerois, head of *wilaya* 4. Djilali Bounamaa was born on 16 April 1926 in Molière (which is today named after him), where his father kept a grocery store, and he received a primary education in the village school.[50] He worked in the mine at Bou Caid, until volunteering to join the army in 1944 where he saw service as a sergeant during the Italian, French, and German campaigns. Although he was retired from the army on the grounds of weak lungs, he returned to the mines where he was active both in the CGT union and the MTLD, and was the organizer of the long and bitter five-month strike that began on 9 October 1952.[51]

[47] On Messalist entryism into the CGT, see B. Bourouiba, *Les syndicalistes algériens*; see also Aissat Hassan, *Aissat Idir. Sa lutte politique et syndicale pour l'indépendance de l'Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 167–9. Bourouiba was one of the FLN union leaders who eventually founded the central body, the *Union générale des travailleurs algériens* (UGTA), on 24 February 1956.

[48] B. Bourouiba, *Les syndicalistes*, 89, notes that one danger in this strategy was that the PPA lost many valuable militants to the communists, among them Sadek Hadjeres, Abdelhamid Benzine, Boualem Khalfa, and Omar Oussedik.

[49] M. Harbi (ed.), *Les archives*, 38.

[50] Sources on Bounamaa are R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 163–4; Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 236–7; Omar Ramdane, 'Si Mohamed Bounaama, chef de la wilaya IV ', *Liberté*, 8 and 9 August 2018, < http://www.liberte-algérie.com/archive>. According to the latter the Bounamaa family was decimated during the War of Independence. His father, Cheikh Mostefa was killed in 1960 in the *douar* Beni Bouattab, his mother, Fatma, was killed by a bomb, his brother Mohamed was imprisoned in 1955, and his sister's husband died in the maquis. The French army demolished the family home.

[51] *Liberté*, 30 October 1952, the communist journalist Paul Pitous interviewed the miners. Six hundred men were out, demanding a 20 per cent increase in wages, a long service bonus, provision of transport, and a meeting of the *Commission supérieure des conventions collectives*. The miners at Timezrit and El Alia were on strike at the same time.

Wanted by the police because of his role in the secret paramilitary OS, Bounamaa emigrated to Belgium where he worked in the coal mines of Borinage, but he was soon back in Molière, where he was kept under surveillance by the gendarmerie. During April and May 1954 the gendarmes searched the home of Bounamaa and other PPA militants at Molière and Bou Caid, and recovered eight illegally held pistols.[52] Bounamaa and a militant Jules Oberic organized a local section of the *Association des anciens combattants français musulmans*, that served as a front organization for political activity.[53] As head of the PPA *kasma* unit in Molière Bounamaa attended the Messalist congress of 13–15 July 1954 at Hornu in Belgium that marked the internal split of the MTLD-PPA from which the FLN was to emerge in November.[54]

Police reports show how Bounamaa was active throughout the central Ouarsenis region, extending the propaganda work of the PPA into rural areas. During October 1954, for example, Bounamaa was organizing clandestine night-time meetings several times a week throughout the *douars* around Bou Caid. Bounamaa seems to have been aware of the secret planning for the insurrection of 1 November, which would indicate that he had at this early stage already deserted the Messalists to join the breakaway FLN faction. On 4 November he was arrested by the gendarmes but a search of his home failed to locate a large stock of explosives that had been moved the day before.[55] Bounamaa was held in the notorious Algiers prison of Serkadji, until his release in November 1955, when he immediately joined the ALN maquis.[56]

The links between the mines and the subsequent creation and expansion of guerrilla networks in the Chelif region is made particularly clear, as at Zaccar and Rouina, by the miner's involvement in the theft of explosives and their skills in demolishing bridges and pylons, and in the construction of land mines and other explosive devices (IEDs). As the early maquis began to form in the Ouarsenis during 1955 the authorities became increasingly concerned by the vulnerability of the explosives store at Bou Caid and the regular convoys that carried 1,500 kilogrammes of explosives from the railway at Orleansville. The

[52] AOM 1K/354, monthly reports of the administrator CM Ouarsenis, for April and May 1954.

[53] Oberic was re-elected president and Bounamaa vice president at a meeting of about twenty militants on 21 April 1954. Bounamaa lodged a complaint with the *Minister of ancien combattants* against the commander of the Gendarme brigade of Molière for harassment of the veterans. Oberic was arrested on 16 August for assaulting gendarmes in Molière who accused him of selling alcohol without a licence.

[54] On the Hornu congress, see B. Stora, *Messali Hadj*, 216–17; Nedjib Sidi Moussa, 'Devenirs Messalistes'. Bounamaa attended as one of three hundred *kasma* delegates from France and Algeria. AOM 4i206, report of Tibère-Inglese, commander of the gendarmerie section of Orléansville, 21 January 1955, noted that Bounamaa on his return from Hornu reported back to a clandestine meeting of the PPA.

[55] AOM 1K/354, monthly report administrator CM Ouarsenis, November 1954.

[56] AOM 91/5Q/138, an informer's report 16 November 1955, shows that Bounamaa's family received a pension while he was in prison, amounting to 15,000 francs for June to September 1955.

security forces were aware of the fact that explosive stores had been a prime target of FLN guerrillas from the first day of the insurrection in November 1954, an anxiety that deepened in Bou Caid after the bloody insurrection of 20 August 1955 in the northern Constantinois when peasant forces, led by the FLN, had attacked the small mining centre of El Alia in order to capture the stored explosives, and massacred thirty-four Europeans.[57]

This led to a panic among the inhabitants of Bou Caid who felt extremely vulnerable and placed pressure on the government to increase security. The administrator Nicolle expressed his concern to his superiors that the mine at Bou Caid had an explosive store that was virtually unprotected, 'at the mercy of future agitators', and 'the miners are also in possession of significant quantities of explosives and detonators and know perfectly well how to employ them'. Nicolle warned his superiors that this was a danger that existed in other mines throughout the region.[58] By October measures had been taken to place additional security forces at the mine, but the FLN was constantly seeking ways to capture the explosives. In November 1955 the FLN tried to recruit an infantry soldier, Mohamed Serbah, stationed in Miliana, to help plant a bomb in the arsenal of the barracks and, when on leave with his family in the *douar* Beni Boukhanous, to assassinate the director of the mine, his deputy, the commander of the Molière gendarmes, and a collaborator named Yechkour.[59]

Teniet el Haad: A Nationalist Enclave in the Ouarsenis

This final section turns to look at the small town of Teniet el Haad, located some 40 kilometres east of Bou Caid, high in the Ouarsenis on the RN14 highway that traversed the mountains from Affreville to Vialar. This case study provides an insight into the clandestine operations of the nationalists, for which there is usually little or fragmentary evidence, in a mountain zone from 1945 to 1954.

Teniet el Haad was first created as a military base in 1843, and by 1926, with a population of 989 Europeans and over 3,000 Algerians, was mainly a transport,

[57] Claire Mauss-Copeaux, *Algérie, 20 août 1955. Insurrection, répression, massacres* (Paris: Payot, 2011). One of the targets of the FLN insurrection on the night of 1–2 November 1954 was the lead mine of Ichmoul in the Constantinois where the objective was to seize 1,500 pounds of dynamite. The attack was driven off by a night watchman who returned fire with an ancient cavalry rifle; Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (London: Macmillan, 1987 edn), 91.

[58] AOM 91/5Q/138, on 15 September 1955, the Algerian deputy Marcel Ribere wrote to the Governor General to say that he had received information from Bisacca, municipal councillor of Bou Caid, and others pointing out the need to defend the mine: 'At this moment in time no form of defense has been put in place in this village. This is why I would be most appreciative if you could look into this as a matter of extreme urgency.' The prefect of Algiers instructed the *Sécretaire general police générale*, 21 October 1955, to carry out an urgent investigation.

[59] AOM 91/5Q/138, report of Captain Tibère-Inglesse, commander of gendarmerie section Orleansvilles, 28 November 1955; sub-prefect of Orleansville to prefect of Algiers, 3 December 1955.

administrative, and commercial centre that served the forest inhabitants of the interior.[60] The mapping of the process of peasant radicalization between the end of the Second World War and 1954 shows a very similar pattern to that of Molière and Bou Caid, with an oil-slick spread of nationalism from the urban hub into the surrounding forest *douars* of Lyra, Khobazza, El Meddad, Ighoud, Beninaouira, Beni Meharaz, Hassena, and Ain el Anceur (Map 4, p. 189). Teniet provided a key point of entry for communist and nationalist propagandists that reached into the mountain zone along the transit route of the N14, and from this island of radicalism diffused outwards into the most isolated *douars*. The processes of urban-rural contact were similar to those of Bou Caid, but more detailed information exists for Teniet, mainly because H. Gauthier, the chief administrator of the CM, was obsessed by the battle against the nationalists. Gauthier, like Nicolle at Bou Caid, was one of the rare administrators to be based in the central mountains and was in a good position to track the rapid expansion of the subversive movement that his superiors, sitting in comfortable offices in Algiers, often seemed to ignore or underestimate.

During 1944 and 1945 the communists in Teniet launched a major campaign against the powerful *grandes familles* headed by the patriarch Belkacem Ferhat that, as seen above, owned large estates in the *commune mixte* and controlled numerous *caidat*. In June 1945 Ferhat complained to the prefect of Algiers about the constant attacks against him in the communist weekly *Liberté* for collaborationism under Vichy.[61] A letter intercepted in the post showed that there was an active branch of the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* in Teniet that informed Mohammed Badsi of the Federation office in Algiers of fraud in the distribution of grain stocks during the famine carried out by the *caid* of Ighoud Benyoucef Ferhat, son of the *bachaga* Ferhat.[62] In the *djemâa* elections of September 1945 the communist lists made considerable gains in the Teniet *douars* but, in the absence of MTLD candidates, acted as a cover for PPA activists that emerged later as the dominant opposition force during 1946 and 1947.

During 1946 the MTLD contested its first elections to the Constituent Assembly (2 June) and the National Assembly (10 November), during which administrators in the Chelif noted a dramatic change in PPA activity in the rural areas. Organized groups of PPA propagandists from the major urban centres were moving into the interior during the electoral campaigns, mainly young and turbulent militants, to harangue crowds gathered on market day or at religious

[60] By 1954 the European population had declined to 765, while Algerians had increased to seven thousand, an indication of the moribund state of the *colons* settlement.

[61] AOM 1K163, prefect of Algiers to Governor General, 21 June 1945. According to informers Ferhat was involved in massive black market operations in grain supplied to Saharan tribes, partly in exchange for guns traded from Tunisia and Libya.

[62] AOM 4i209, letter intercepted 23 November 1945.

festivals, in rapid meetings that dispersed before the police could intercede.[63] The Braz administrator described them as youths 'often of a dubious morality who have nothing to lose and express themselves without any restraint', shading into criminal subversion.[64] Several 'incidents' in the Teniet region, coinciding with the November elections, point to the underlying tensions building up between the militant peasants and the *caids*. For example, on 19 November Abdelkader Chami, a farmer from Ighoud, was arrested for assaulting the *caid* Benyoucef Ferhat with a stave during a dispute that burst out on market day in a café of Bourbaki. During an investigation by gendarmes the newly elected MTLD deputy Ahmed Mezerna interceded personally on Chami's behalf and led a crowd of four hundred demonstrators that gathered outside the town hall.[65]

Most incendiary of all was an anonymous threatening letter addressed to Benyoucef Ferhat, his brother and father, that police traced to Mohammed Belkaceni, the 17-year-old son of a Kabyle shopkeeper living in the Sersou town of Bourbaki (see Photo 4).

The three Ferhat *caids* were given up to 1 January to resign their posts or face death, and *colons* were offered the notorious choice of the suitcase or the coffin. While Belkaceni, who boasted to his interrogators of his exploits, could be dismissed as a hot-headed and melodramatic youth, the incident is revealing of the insurrectionary climate that was building up in the Teniet region.

Belkaceni's statement as to his motives in sending the letter confirms what we know from other sources, that the propaganda message of the Messalists was quite simple, but all the more powerful for that: 'I am anti-French, like all the members of the PPA, and I want all the French to quit Algeria, which is a Muslim country, as soon as possible. The phrase, "Chose the suitcase or the coffin", means that all the French must leave Algeria or they will be killed.'[66]

The Belkaceni incident is revealing of the trackways or networks through which ideas, propaganda, and personnel circulated between urban centres and the isolated peasant communities of the Ouarsenis. The PPA militants in Teniet, as well as in some of the outlying *douars*, were in regular contact with Duperré, Affreville, Vialar, and Algiers, either by the post and telephone, or through agents travelling by car and rail. More unexpected is the evidence of direct links between the Ouarsenis and the Djurdjura of Kabylia, the great cockpit of nationalism, lying some 200 kilometres to the east. The emigration of Kabyle peasants to France, and its role in the early development of nationalism, is well known, but few have remarked on the simultaneous diaspora towards the Ouarsenis and Dahra where Kabyle shopkeepers and traders became dominant throughout the towns of the region. Although the Kabyles shopkeepers of Molière were described by the administration as moderate supporters of the UDMA, and pro-French, there were

[63] M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 90, on his youthful involvement in PPA '*meetings volantes*', that moved too fast to allow informers and the police to close in on them.

[64] AOM 91301/59, CM administrator of Braz to sub-prefect, November 1946.

[65] AOM 1K163, report of gendarmes of Affreville, 25 November 1946.

[66] AOM 1K163.

BOURBAKI 14 DEC 1946

Monsieur Le caïd

FERHAT
Ben youcef ben Belkacem

Je vous prie de Dimissionner
du pouvoir caïdat
de donner la Dimission
ou de mourir
tu donneras ta dimission
avant le Ier Janvier
toi même Ben youcef et ton père
Ferhat Belkacem ben Melhoul

// نصر من الله //

Ou on va vous tuer avant
le 5 janvier vous allez
mourir vous trois /

A b A t Le colonialisme
A b A t La France

Français de nos village .
Choisissez La
valise - ou le cerceuil
De ma part
Le maquisard
agé de 18 1/2
le 3.

//vive messali
//vive le P.P.A
//Abat Les colons

N.B. la mention d'origine (Bourbaki) est posée au tampon mais à l'envers. Date également apposée au moyen d'un tampon(dateur)

Photo 4 Death threat letter sent by Mohammed Belkacemi to the Ferhat *caids* in December 1946. This is a police reproduction of the original. Copyright AOM.

undoubtedly others who were militant nationalists.[67] Through their continuing links to the Djurdjura, and the fact that Kabyle traders could readily transport

[67] AOM 91309/59, administrator Braz (Miliana) to sub-prefect, 9 April 1949, noted that the Kabyle *commerçant* Cherfaoui, who stood as an independent in the elections to the Algerian Assembly, had been able to mobilize the network of Kabyles shopkeepers throughout the region.

propaganda literature, instructions, and personnel into the Ouarsenis, ensured a close and continuing connection between the two mountain zones.[68]

Although Belkaceni's father lived in Bourbaki, where he was a shopkeeper and town councillor, the son's home was in the Djurdjura where, he told the Teniet police, he had been recruited into a PPA cell three months earlier when he had sworn an oath on the Koran and was trained, along with four other young men from the *douar* Bouakkache as '*sacrifiée*', terrorists who were prepared, at the cost of their lives, to carry out assassinations. He claimed to have been in close, regular contact with Ahmed Oumeri, a famous maquisard who was supported by the local population, and he had written at his request a similar threatening letter to the *caid* Ait Si Slimane Larbi.[69] Although Mohammed Belkaceni probably offered little real danger to the Ferhat family, the sentiments he expressed were very much those of the PPA militants in the Ouarsenis, and also reveal the extent to which subversive ideas were readily channelled across northern Algeria through commercial networks.

By late 1946 the CM administrators were warning their superiors that they were rapidly losing the battle in the *douars* against the growing power and confidence of the PPA. In the Braz the administrator recommended rapid legal action to arrest the, 'insulting behaviour towards the *caids*, provocation to revolt, and anti-French intrigues'.[70] Following the further gains of the MTLD in the *djemâa* elections of November 1947 no administrator took this more to heart than Gauthier in Teniet who unleashed a sustained drive '*à la Naegelen*' to harass and arrest nationalist militants.

The entire seventeen-man *djemâa* of Khobbaza was imprisoned at the time of the crucial elections to the Algerian Assembly,[71] but far from achieving the intended effect only served to reinforce the public standing of the 'martyrs' of the cause. Twelve men of the Khobbaza *djemâa*, complained the CM administrator of Teniet el Haad, Gauthier, provisionally released from prison on 8 May, gathered next day during the official ceremonies of Armistice Day and the Feast of Joan of Arc, to publicly celebrate their victory in an Arab café opposite the bureau of the *caid* Abderrahmane Zitouni with the intent purpose of humiliating him. Zitouni, dressed in his splendid *caidal* robes on his way to the ceremonials, was crossed in the street by the militants who 'looked him over in a brazen way

[68] T. Chentouf, *L'Algérie en 1954*, 97, the CM of Cassaigne in the western Dahra reported *c.*1953: 'The majority of travelling Kabyle salesmen make frequent journeys and because of this represent, from the political point of view, a certain danger if one takes into account that most of them profess nationalist sentiments.'

[69] Ahmed Oumeri (Ahmed Belaidi) was a famous '*bandit d'honneur*' who had deserted from the French army and taken to the maquis, where he was killed on 6 February 1947 after being drawn into a trap.

[70] AOM 91301/59, CM administrator of Braz to sub-prefect of Miliana, November 1946.

[71] AOM 1K/156, monthly report, 28 April 1948.

without, of course, paying homage'.[72] What Gauthier failed to mention was that 8 May held quite a different symbolic meaning for the nationalists, the date on which they commemorated the Sétif massacre of 1945. On the following day the twelve freed men carried the flame of revolt into the neighbouring *douar* of Bethaia where they held a public meeting in the marketplace, until broken up by the field guard. The release of the Khobazza men by the Orleansville court was, claimed Gauthier, a grave error since, 'any measure of this kind can only be interpreted by the population of primitives as a sign of weakness by the authorities and will only encourage them to more arrogance', and to inflame the neighbouring *douars*.[73]

A month earlier Gauthier had personally led the repressive charge against two other PPA militants, the brothers Abdelkader and Tayeb Houachem, but on this occasion he met his match and became embroiled in a four-year-long battle to put them in prison. Abdelkader Houachem, a 65-year-old farmer, had won the 1945 *djemâa* election in the *douar* Ain el Anseur on a communist list, although he lost the following election of November 1947 when he stood for the PPA. The Houachem brothers, who had been sentenced to one year of prison for cattle rustling, appear to have been of the class of tough peasants that were not to be meddled with.

Abdelkader, on 26 March 1948, as was often the practice with the Messalists, used a religious or community gathering, on this occasion a funeral, to make a speech in which he persuaded all those present to vote PPA in the crucial election to the Algerian Assembly on 4 April: 'The French count as nothing for us', reported an informer, 'the Government will collapse after the 4 April [election], and the *caids* and fraction chiefs will wander about like dogs.'[74] Gauthier seized the opportunity to bring about Houachem's arrest and interrogation at the gendarmerie of Trolard Taza on 1 April, at which he was present, so as to remove this troublesome man three days before the election. On 3 April the Justice of the Peace of Teniet condemned Houachem to eight months of prison, although this was commuted on appeal by the civil court of Orleansville to six months and a fine of 5,000 francs.

Gauthier's fears about the growing threat of the PPA in the lead into the critical elections to the Algerian Assembly in 1948 proved well founded. The militants trashed the voting station in Teniet, burned the ballot boxes and took the returning officers, the secretary and president, hostage, finally releasing them

[72] AOM 4i209, administrator CM Teniet el Haad to sub-prefect of Miliana, 11 and 24 May 1948. Under the old native code, that remained very much alive in the rural memory, a peasant could be fined or imprisoned if an administrator thought that he had failed to make the proper salutation.

[73] AOM 4i209, 11 May 1948. Gauthier was reiterating a standard colonial topos, that simple 'natives' only respected the strong hand of the master.

[74] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 30 January 1950.

the following day after negotiations led by the *caid*. The police, who fired on the crowds, began to track down and arrest numerous militants.[75]

After this wave of repression, little more was heard of Abdelkader Houachem until early 1950 when he dramatically reopened the dispute with Gauthier by lodging an official complaint that the administrator had, at the moment of his arrest in April 1948, taken 20,000 francs that he wished to see restituted. His brother, Tayeb, initiated a quite separate action in which he accused the *caid* and the head of the gendarmes at Trolard Taza of instigating a plot to have him killed by family relatives with whom he was in dispute over land and grazing rights. The brothers were condemned by the Algiers appeal court to four months of prison and a 25,000 francs fine for 'a slanderous denunciation of the local authorities', but, to the intense anger of Gauthier, they gained their temporary release after a further appeal to the supreme appeal court. The administrator, judging by the enormous volume of correspondence with the sub-prefect and other superiors, was obsessed by the Houachem affair, that he regarded as a test case of the resolve of the judiciary and colonial government to put a stop to the nationalist subversion of the *caidat*, the *commune mixte*, and the global system of indirect rule.

Gauthier's lengthy and repetitive reports to his superiors reflect the official mindset of the administrators as they came under intense pressure from the nationalists. Gauthier claimed that Abdelkader Houachem had been to Algiers on several occasions in early 1950 and that the accusations made against him had been drafted and typed by the central MTLD apparatus as part of a campaign to undermine him and the administration. Throughout 1950 Gauthier was enraged at what he saw as the failure of the local JP, the Orleansville tribunal and higher courts to deal rapidly with the Houachem brothers and to get them imprisoned. On about 2 June the Orleansville court condemned the Houachem brothers to two months of prison and a 15,000 francs fine, which Gauthier dismissed as a 'derisory' sentence. The Houachem immediately appealed, only to face an Algiers Appeal court that increased the sentence to four months and a 25,000 francs fine, but again a further appeal was lodged with the supreme Court of Cassation. On 18 December Gauthier was urging the sub-prefect of the considerable political dangers presented by the fact that the Houachem brothers were still free to propagandize at the moment that the important election of 4 April was approaching and that every step should be taken to accelerate the appeal process to ensure that they were in prison by 20 January at the latest.

Gauthier informed his superiors that the long, slow appeals procedure had left the Houachem brothers free throughout the period from June to December 1947

[75] The first PPA cell in Teniet was established in 1938, and was assisted in its growth after 1942 through the opening of a section of the *Scouts musulmans algériens* (SMA), a movement created by Mohamed Bouras of Miliana, who was accused by the French of spying for the Germans and executed on 27 May 1941.

to return home into their *douar* where they were dangerously subverting the local authorities. The administrator shared, although in a particularly acute form, a standard colonial discourse that, in seeking to contain a potentially turbulent population, laid less emphasis on the strength of the police, gendarmes, and army, although that was always in reserve, and more on the psychological manipulation of what was viewed as a childlike, primitive, and instinctual 'race'. Gauthier held to the belief that 'Arabs' would only respect and obey the severe master who dispensed an immediate but fair justice, and, he claimed, French legal procedure was entirely unsuited to the native mind and to the difficult work of the CM administration. The PPA, he believed, was engaged in a strategy of subversion that had less to do with stocking weapons for an insurrection, than with propaganda aimed at simple and impressionable peasants to convince them of the powerlessness of the authorities compared to the strength of local nationalists. The peasants, he claimed, simply did not understand the complexities of an appeal procedure, so that the Houachem brothers were currently propagandizing the countryside and boasting of their impunity and ability to outwit the French. 'Our two troublemakers can use the false argument of a supposed absence of a condemnation to give the misleading impression of the feeble nature of the authorities and the courts', and needed little more, 'to ensure, among the primitive elements of their *douar* with their impulsive reactions, the success of an anti-French campaign in the region'.[76] Gauthier placed constant pressure on the sub-prefect of Miliana to intervene with the Algiers authorities, which he did, and on three occasions the prefect of Algiers, Camille Ernst, wrote to the Procureur General of the appeal court asking him, to instruct his subordinates to show particular vigilance in cases involving the prestige of a functionary.[77] Gauthier was not entirely mistaken in his interpretation of the communist and PPA strategy since, as we have seen in the actions of Keddar in Duperré, of Belhadj in Zeddine and other instances, the anti-colonialists used every opportunity to challenge the regime by weaponizing official and legal procedures.

During 1950 Gauthier was doing everything possible, including the use of informers, to collect further intelligence that could be used against the Houachem brothers, and this information provides a valuable insight into the content of the propaganda that the nationalists were spreading at every opportunity in the *douar* of Ain el Anseur and elsewhere in the Ouarsenis. A first point of resistance was what Abdelkader Houachem described as a form of 'civil

[76] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 18 December 1950.

[77] AOM 1K/402, prefect of Algiers to *Procureur général*, 14 February 1950. Ernst noted that the violent attacks by Keddar and Poulet in Duperré on Aramu, the police commissioner, and by Abdelkader Houachem, were damaging the prestige of the authorities among the 'very impressionable [population] that were readily influence by rumours of this kind and have the most regrettable repercussions'.

disobedience', a refusal to obey or comply with all the usual demands made by the authorities, starting with a refusal to make a declaration of the area of land under cereals, on which tax assessments were based, and not to pay taxes after the harvest, a grave act remarked Gauthier since in Muslim societies tax payment had always been 'the symbol of submission to the established authorities'. Other acts of disobedience included a refusal to work for *colons* at harvest time, or to carry out such poor work that it would demoralize the *roumi* (infidels). If wages remained too low they should set fire to the hay stacks, nor should they answer to the summons, or pay the fines, charged by forest guards and the gendarmes. They should petition or demand justice against the authorities, whether the claims were justified or not. Houachem, in calling for action, made a lot of his own apparent immunity and the weakening nature of the colonial administration: 'Be men. Unite and help us. Do like me: protest on all occasions and create difficulties for the local authorities, don't listen to them and oppose their orders. Have no fear of an administration that is decadent, nor a government that has no more authority. You can see clearly that I, who rose up against the authority, I am still here and nothings happened to me.'[78]

Gauthier warned his superiors that such propaganda was having an impact, and that the *caids*, whom he met on a weekly basis, were becoming demoralized by their loss of authority and a growing, confrontational or threatening manner among the population. The field guard of Ain el Anseur had been outrageously struck on two occasions on market day, in full view of the crowds, while the head of the gendarmerie brigade had just looked on.[79]

The hollowing-out of French authority was linked in the nationalist discourse to a second stage, towards the theme of liberation in which the buckling of colonial administration would open the way to local self-government by Algerians. In what sounds like a distant echo of Lucien Paye's municipal reform and dissolution of the *caidat*, Haouchem claimed: 'soon we will see the back of the administrators of the *commune mixte* and the *caids*, we will have a mayor and field guard of our own race.'[80]

Finally, the PPA orator intimated that French imperialism was crumbling not only internally in rural Algeria but also internationally. During 1948 to 1950 there was an intense interest in the war in Indochina and both the PCA and PPA were

[78] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 20 April 1950; and report of an informer in the *douar* Ain el Anseur, 15 February, who signed himself '*votre agent No. 1*'. Informers reports are notoriously unreliable, and need to be treated with caution, but the types of action listed are similar to those we find from other reports in the Chelif.

[79] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 11 August 1950.

[80] AOM 1K/402, informers report, 15 February 1950. In October 1950 peasants in the *douar* Main likewise proclaimed a virtual UDI by replacing the *caid* and other agents of the CM with their own mayor, deputy mayor, and Justice of the Peace.

involved in actions by dock workers to prevent troop ships leaving for Vietnam, while peasant activists like Saadoun challenged the army teams that set out their recruitment stalls on market day. Gauthier reported that four religious teachers (*tolbas*) in the *douar* Lyra of the Teniet CM dissuaded youths from joining the army since they would be sent to Indochina, 'and we have need of them here. There will be a "movement next summer"', intimating that an insurrection was pending. The *tolbas* also sustained one of the enduring millenarian myths of the Maghreb, that the French might seem all powerful, but a great warrior or external power would soon arrive to crush Algerian colonialism. 'The French have little time left to them here. We can assure you of this because we are in touch with Abd El-Krim.'[81]

Abd El-Krim, the prestigious leader of the great Rif War in Morocco, had escaped to Egypt from his long exile on the island of Réunion in 1947 where he founded the *Comité de libération du Maghreb arabe* that began the first training programme for commandos in the future liberation wars.[82] After Nasser's seizure of power in 1952 Algerian nationalists would look to Egypt as the key support for a liberation struggle.

The final claim of the PPA orators, and the ultimate promise for land-hungry peasants, was that on driving out the *colons* their property would be divided up among the people. As Gauthier's informer told him, the public message of the Haouchem was 'that foreign powers will come to our assistance, perhaps in one or two years, if we can agree among ourselves, and we will be rid of these French who will return all our property and lands that the *colons* took from us'.[83]

Faced with intelligence on what looked like a rapidly growing insurrectionary climate in the Ouarsenis it was not surprising that Gauthier, who administered the most isolated and vulnerable of *colons* townships, was so nervous. By 15 March 1950 Gauthier had received information that Abdelkader Houachem had been seen in Orleansville, immediately after registering his appeal in the tribunal, in animated conversation with Ahmed Bensmain, a former town councillor of Teniet and head of the local PPA.[84] Gauthier's fears would no doubt have been confirmed when later in the month the entire national network of the clandestine paramilitary OS was uncovered.

This immediately triggered a vast police operation across Algeria to track down and destroy the paramilitary network, and by May the *Renseignements généraux* (RG) had uncovered a PPA-OS cell in Teniet that was involved in extending

[81] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 20 April 1950.
[82] Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN, 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 17, 558.
[83] AOM 1K/402, informer report, 15 February 1950.
[84] AOM 1K/402, Gauthier to sub-prefect, 15 March 1950.

networks and propaganda into the surrounding mountain *douars*, and training future commandos.[85] The Miliana police identified what it called a '*section d'assaut*', almost certainly an OS subsection, of ten men headed by Ahmed Bensmain, a MTLD town councillor in Teniet el Haad.[86] The intelligence report indicates that the section was actively organizing among the Ouarsenis peasantry, and identified M'Hamed Chaibi, ex-president of the *djemâa* of Beni Mahraz, as a rural propagandist, Abderrahmane Zmirli or Zemiri, ex-town councillor, and Bouabdallah Madaoui as rural recruiters, Abdallah Boukara as a propagandist, and Boutouchent Temeur as youth organizer.

Ahmed Bensmain sought to escape arrest by moving with his family to the Algiers *bidonvilles* of Clos Salembier where he rented a shack, while working as a café waiter, while Abderrahman Zemiri, also an ex-town councillor, left Teniet for Duperré where he worked as a hairdresser.[87] At some stage Bensmain returned to resume his activities in Teniet, and in March 1954 he was contacted by the UDMA leader Ferhat Abbas when he visited the town.[88] Bensmain appears to have been among the first militants of the region to have gone into the maquis after November 1954, but in August 1955 he was arrested, along with other members of his group, by the gendarmes of Teniet.[89]

In conclusion, the evidence from the Ouarsenis shows that the peasants, far from inhabiting isolated communities as administrators often claimed, were by 1946 deeply penetrated by the nationalist movement that reached into even the most distant mountain *douars*. Effective *kasma* cells had been established in Molière, Bou Caid, and Teniet el Haad that were in regular contact by post, telephone, and mobile agents with the national leadership in Algiers. The *kasma* sections, in turn, were actively spreading their propaganda into the surrounding *douars*, adapting the nationalist message to the peasant audience that gathered in markets, religious festivals, and cafés, and working closely with *djemâa* leaders that were in the forefront of anti-*caid* actions. While, by 1948 the Naegelen repression appears to have succeeded in breaking the back of the nationalist advance, in reality, as the top-level Messalist meeting at Zeddine had shown, the radical, insurrectionary wing had gone underground. During 1950 the administrator Gauthier at Teniet, in conflict with the Houachem brothers, became aware of this disconcerting fact. The small window of time between 1945 to 1948 was crucial in the formation of a radical leadership in the *douars* and shantytowns that, even when it seems to have disappeared from the record or entered a phase of quietism, was still very much active, as was seen to

[85] AOM 4i209, RG Miliana to *Commissaire divisionnaire* RG Algiers, 23 May 1950.
[86] AOM 4i209, RG Miliana to RG Algiers, 23 May 1950.
[87] Several leading OS members from the Chelif, including Djillali Belhadj, were arrested, while others, among them the miner of Bou Caid, Bounaama, went into hiding or moved to France.
[88] AOM 1K/349, monthly report sub-prefect of Miliana, March 1954.
[89] *L'Echo d'Alger*, 11 August 1955, 'Une cellule terroriste découverte à Téniet-el-Haad'.

be the case when exactly the same individual militants resurfaced after 1954 in the FLN maquis.

However, few, if any, of the Ouarsenis peasants bent on armed insurrection could be described as socialist revolutionaries. Indeed, while deeply anti-colonial, they were also highly conservative and bound by religious traditionalism, as I go on to show in the next chapter.

11
Popular Religion
The Rural Battleground

In order to understand how both communists and nationalists attempted to extend their propaganda into the *douars* and to gain purchase among the peasantry we need to take into account the part that religion played and which suffused every aspect of everyday life, of social organization and culture. In the absence of a socialist ideology or developed sense of national identity in the countryside, it was Islam that played the fundamental role as the cement of popular resistance, the substratum of shared belief that united people across the differences of tribe, region, class, and ethnicity. The PPA leader Ait-Ahmed remarked, 'The only current . . . that was able to integrate the population into a radical, revolutionary movement was popular Islam, the sincere faith of the humble'.[1]

One of the challenges facing both the PCA and the PPA in their strategies of contact and propaganda in rural society was how to deploy a popular language that would appeal, or make sense, to peasants who inhabited isolated mountains and led a way of life that was suffused with a '*marabout*' culture of saints, holy shrines, and magical charms.[2] Here the communists faced a particularly difficult challenge since, as a mixed ethnic party, they had to balance the needs of Muslim militants, as well as those of Europeans that shared a basic French identity and the values of Republican secularism in which the idea of progress was posited on the overthrow of clerical reaction and religious obscurantism.[3] *Maraboutism* was, in general, seen as a conservative political force that, according to the well-used phrase the 'opium of the people', acted, as had reactionary Catholic clericalism in mainland France, to reinforce peasant ignorance and was supported by

[1] H. Ait-Ahmed, *Mémoires*, 46; see also Mohammed Harbi, *L'Algérie et son destin*, and Ricardo Rene Laremont, *Islam and the Politics of Resistance in Algeria 1783–1992* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2000).

[2] On '*maraboutism*', see Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940. Essai d'histoire religieuse et sociale* (Algiers: Éditions El Hikma, 1999), 54–66; on the customs and beliefs of Algerian rural society in general, Yvonnes Turin, *Affrontements culturel dans l'Algérie colonial* (Algiers: ENAL, 1983); Nefissa Zerdoumi, *Enfants d'hier, l'éducation de l'enfant en milieu traditionnel algérien* (Paris: Maspero, 1982); Jean Servier, *Tradition et Civilisation Berbères. Les portes de l'année* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1985); and for the Chelif region, Jacques Lizot, *Metidja*.

[3] Gaston Donnat, *Afin que nul n'oublie*, 169, emphasized the difficulty faced by European communists in the Ténès region in comprehending the world of the mountain peasants, despite the best efforts of the local Algerian militants.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

the French administration as a divide-and-rule strategy to weaken anti-colonial movements.[4] However, as we have seen (Chapter 7) there were communist peasant leaders like Abdallah Mokarnia, Tahar Ghomri, Hadj Mohamed Zitoufi, and Mekki Chebbah who saw no contradiction between socialism and Islam, and were perfectly at ease in the mystical world of the mountain people. The communists in the Chelif were faced with the difficult tactical decision of how to strike a balance, or draw a line, between everyday religious practices, such as arranged marriage, the worship of saints, and magical amulets, that might be tolerated, and actions by conservative religious leaders that were working directly to support the colonial regime.

The communist leader Mustapha Saadoun, a peasant who had a close knowledge of mountain society, knew how crucial it was for maquisards to have an ethnologist's empathy with the rural population. A false step in relation to entrenched peasant belief could have damaging long-term consequences as had happened in the case of the ALN units, to which he had transferred from the PCA in late 1956, which alienated the inhabitants of the isolated fraction of Tlakhikh in the *douar* Bou Maad in the eastern Dahra. The Tlakhikh, noted Saadoun, belonged to a tribe that was known for its, 'social and linguistic conservatism. Rough and uncultured, proud, and isolated in a naturally disadvantaged zone . . .'. But leaders of the early ALN forces in this area acted in a brutal way towards the inhabitants, 'a credulous population that was strongly under the influence of the *marabout* Sidi Abdallah or Amrane', and assaulted the venerable leader of the fraction, the *cheikh* Sahnoun. This provoked a strong reaction among the peasants who attacked the ALN, and enabled the French military to create a base in Bou Maad and to establish a strong *harkis* unit.[5]

The rest of this chapter is divided into two parts: the first looks at the question of *maraboutism*, mainly through an examination of the way that competing interests, the colonial administration, peasant leaders in the *douars*, and anti-colonial militants fought for political control of the religious pilgrimages and feasts (*taams*) in the Chelif region. The second part examines the puritanical movement of the *Ulema*, a proto-nationalist organization, and the degree to which it had penetrated into the rural interior and prepared the ground for insurrection.

[4] AOM 91/1K 1231, *Monographie politique*, *arrondissement* Orleansville, 20 July 1954, the sub-prefect R. Plait, remarked that communism as a materialist ideology would always fail in Muslim countries, 'among a people attached to its familial and religious traditions'.

[5] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 55; AOM 4SAS74, intelligence report by Delapierre, sub-prefecture Miliana, 3 September 1956, on the uprising of the population of Bou Maad on 29–30 August when they killed three ALN guerrillas, and captured two who were handed over to the army. It was this anti-ALN revolt in the douar Bou Maad that inspired Jean Servier to first formulate his plan for '*Opération Pilote*'; see *Adieu Djebels* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1958), 145–7.

Pilgrimage and Contestation in the Chelif

The Chelif region, as in the rest of Algeria, was dotted about with the white shrines (*kouba*) of saints or holy men, the more important of which drew pilgrims considerable distances, or from surrounding *douars*, to celebrate with mass feasting (*taams*), ritual dancing, and horsemanship. During these great collective rituals, in which many thousands participated, peasants would travel on foot cross-country for days, building up numbers as the column advanced through the *douars*. For most of the year members of one *douar* would have little, if any, contact with those from another community, and they would usually avoid crossing into the territory of another group with whom relations could be volatile. However, the pilgrimage, rather like the marketplace, provided a space in which traditional inter-group hostilities and violence were set aside, and tribal disputes were regulated by the saintly intercession of the *marabouts* élites.[6] The pilgrimage had a political significance since it enabled a form of safe-conduct and a point of contact between peasants from widely dispersed communities who gathered to exchange news and barter goods.

The ethnologist Jacques Lizot, who studied the Ouarsenis ceremonies at first hand in the 1960s, distinguished the small-scale feasts that took place at the level of the fraction (*bocca*), from the bigger *taams* like that of Sidi Amah in the *douar* Beni Hindel.[7] The first was an assertion of the symbolic unity of the immediate fraction, while the latter was an expression of the common ancestry of the wider dispersed tribal group, based on a real or mythical founder.[8] Ritual feasting thus had a political function to the extent that it defined the boundaries of the kin and clan, and at the same time controlled long-standing group hostility, enabling peasants to socialize and make contact in an environment in which the role of the *marabout* as holy arbiter was to guarantee a space free from inter-group violence.

The police and administration, which were deeply suspicious towards any form of gathering of peasants that might provide a cover or forum for clandestine political organization, maintained a close surveillance of the pilgrimages and their organizers.[9] Such close policing of religious networks had its origins in the late

[6] For a classic analysis of this Maghrebian system of tribal regulation, see Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld, 1969); John A. Hall, *Ernest Gellner: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso, 2010), 58–71.

[7] There were several hundred small, local shrines throughout the Chelif region, often a place of gathering for village women: see Jean Servier, 'Les rites du labour en Algérie', *Journal de la société des africanistes* 21.2 (1951), 178, who identified numerous local pilgrimages in the Dahra, each saint endowed with specialized powers, to ensure fertility and safe childbirth, protect livestock from disease, to bring rain, etc.; AOM 91/1K 1231, *Monographie politique*, CM Djendel, 24 January 1953, provides a census of forty-eight holy sites.

[8] J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 117–19.

[9] A law of 1880 subjected pilgrimages to strict regulation, and official permission had to be gained, sometimes up to twenty days in advance.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the Sufi brotherhoods like the Rhamania, Tarika, Qadiria, and Darqawia, had provided the impetus and organizational base for the great rural revolts, like that of Mokrani in 1871 or in the Aurès insurrection of 1916.[10] By the 1940s however the brotherhoods and their religious centres (*zaouia*) were regarded by the colonial administration as moribund, and a change of policy had taken place by which the *marabouts* were now actively supported and encouraged as a conservative and populist counter-weight to the communists, nationalists, and the puritanical *Ulema*.

In 1953 Zannettacci, administrator of the CM of Cherchell, put forward the standard official line: while the brotherhoods that provided the organizational base for a potential resistance were in decline, popular '*maraboutism*' was increasing in strength, and was even driving back the anti-colonial movements that had spread into the interior since 1945. 'This was, in short, a reaction of rural people against those of the city. This reaction is going on right now and its up to us to guide and strengthen it with the help of local *marabouts* who are devoted and favourable to us.'[11]

How the colonial state set out to manipulate or give official backing to the pilgrimage as a tool of conservative neo-tribalism can be illustrated by the case of the *bachaga* Boualam. Chapter 4 looked at the way in which patrimonial power and patron-client relations, as in the case of the Saiah family, in spite of entering a period of crisis during the 1930s, still maintained a considerable degree of power in the Chelif. The outstanding example of this process, how religious charisma (*baraka*) was manipulated to support the authority of a loyalist 'tribal' leader, is provided by the *bachaga* Said Boualam. He was to achieve fame during the Algerian War as the model of the pro-French notable when he played a key role in crushing the communist Red Maquis, and in forming the peasants of the *douar* Beni Boudaoune into a *harki* fighting unit.

Four generations of the Boualam had served with the French army, seen action in colonial wars from Mexico to Tonkin, Syria, and Morocco, and after demobilization became *caids*, later rising to the honorary rank of *agha*: 'All of them', proudly claimed the *bachaga* of his family, 'were decorated with the *Légion d'Honneur* and numerous medals won in combat against the enemies of France'.[12] Said Boualam was born in Souk Ahras in the Constantinois in October 1906, where his father was posted with the First Regiment of the Algerian Infantry. While his father subsequently led a peripatetic existence for thirty-two years as a mounted gendarme, the young Said was raised by his mother

[10] See Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[11] AOM 4i197, S. Zannettacci, *Monographie politique*, 20 February 1953, 71–2.

[12] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 37.

in the Dahra east of Ténès, where the Boualam family, descended from the Souhalias tribe, owned most of their landed property.[13]

At the age of 13 Said entered the military boarding schools at Saint-Hippolyte-du-Fort and Montreuil-sur-Mer, and on leaving school passed straight into the army as a volunteer, where he served for twenty-one years before retiring in 1946 with the grade of reserve captain. The army and gendarmerie provided a standard springboard into the *caidat* and on 11 April 1947 Said Boualam, at the age of 40, was appointed *caid* of the central Ouarsenis *douar* of Beni Bou Attab, and then was rapidly promoted a year later to the neighbouring *douar* of Beni Boudouane.[14]

The vast *douar* Beni Boudouane that covered 33,000 hectares of mountains and forest was one of the most isolated regions of the central Ouarsenis.[15] It was this relative lack of contact with the outside world that ensured the late survival of the most traditional features of a 'tribal' society and patrimonial power relations. The *bachaga* Boualam, although from a relatively modest family background, set out to create all the trappings of a great nobleman. In his memoirs Boualam gave the impression that his ancestral roots lay among the tribespeople of the Beni Boudouane, which was not the case, since his family came from the Dahra and he had only arrived in the *douar* as recently as 1948. Nor did he opt to live among 'his people' in the vast mountain-locked Beni Boudouane, since he resided in a large, stone farmhouse near Lamartine, from where he could gain quick access by car to Orleansville and Oued Fodda.[16] Photographs of the *bachaga* show that the long flowing robes he wore on ceremonial occasions were draped over expensive, tailored suits.

How Boualam cultivated his image as an aristocratic chieftain, the 'father' of his people, can be illustrated by his role during the great pilgrimage that took place every May in the Beni Boudouane after the barley harvest. Thousands of peasants walked in long columns to the shrine of Moulay Abdelkader el Djilani high in the mountainous interior. Boualam, writing in 1962 from exile on his Provençal farm Mas Thibert, described how the entire population of Beni Boudouane would arrive at the shrine (*kouba*), to construct a temporary village of tents and huts, and the head of each family would slaughter a sheep and prepare couscous. The next morning Boualam would arrive in a cortège that was welcomed by the strident *yous-yous* of the women and musket salvos of each of the twenty-four

[13] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 36–8. The Boualam owned property in the *douars* of Taouira and Sinfita, the same location as that of the Zitoufi clan. Said Boualam's brother Alexandre, 'Si Lassen' was assassinated by the Zitoufi guerrilla in his farmhouse in Taouria in July 1956. Said Boualam provides a detailed account, B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 120–2 (see Chapter 13).

[14] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 119.

[15] Giulia Fabbiano, '"Pour moi, l'Algérie, c'est les Béni-Boudouane, le reste j'en sais rien"', *Le Mouvement social* 236.3 (2011), 47–60.

[16] The house still stands a few miles south of Lamartine (El Karmia), and can be seen in pl. 1 in B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 16.

fractions in turn. 'After greeting all the notables and the elders of the tribe, I remounted my thoroughbred, chestnut Arab, magnificent with its girths encrusted in gold, its white mane like wheat in the sun.'[17] Then pilgrims from other *douars* in the Attafs would arrive, each fraction behind the pennants of their *marabouts*, to the sound of flutes, drums, and salvos of shotguns. Offerings (*ziara*) would be made to the teachers (*talebs*) and *marabouts*, and after a *fantasia* by charging horsemanship, the men would dance the Allaouia, '*la danse des fusils*'. At about 2 o'clock each family, in groups of ten, would bring their couscous and mutton to the *mokhadem* who would oversee the correct division into about eight hundred big platters. The *bachaga* then received each notability and his share of the offerings, between ten and twenty sheep, before the feast (*taam*) was closed at about four with a 'gigantic *fantasia*'.[18]

Such pilgrimages are important to an understanding of the politics of the Dahra and Ouarsenis.[19] Not only did they remain dynamic and hugely popular, but they also served to sustain the support-base and legitimacy for those *caids*, often 'new' men from a commoner middle peasant background, who by assuming the lifestyle of the aristocracy and associating themselves with the cult of the saints, laid claim to a prestigious noble or *marabout* status and even a degree of *baraka*. Anthropologists of the Mediterranean have noted the link between religion and patrimonialism, particularly in relation to Catholicism, with its range of benevolent patron saints, intermediaries between man and God, that provided a sacred parallel to hierarchical patron-client relations.[20] *Maraboutism* served a similar conservative function, which was reinforced by the French authorities' revival of ceremonials that represented not simply the survival of ancient customs but, in Hobsbawm's term, an 'invented tradition'.[21] The most influential *caids* liked to extend invitations to European dignitaries, *colons*, and army officers to attend the annual feasts, which they enjoyed, rather like tourists at an Orientalist spectacle.[22]

[17] See B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 177, a photograph titled, 'Au combat pour la France', shows the medalled *bachaga* in his flowing robes, holding the reins of his finely apparelled horse.

[18] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 134–6. For an excellent documentary film of a contemporary pilgrimage of this kind, see Manoël Penicaud and Khamis Mesbah, '*Baraka Paths*' (2007), an annual pilgrimage lasting forty days in the Essaouira region of Morocco, available on Youtube.

[19] Yazid Ben Hounet, *L'Algérie des tribus. Le fait tribal dans le haut sud-ouest contemporain* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 346–61, provides an eyewitness account and political analysis of just such a festival (*wada*) held in south-west Algeria in 2004.

[20] Jeremy Boissevain, 'When the Saints Go Marching On: Reflections on the Decline of Patronage in Malta', in E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (eds), *Patrons and Clients* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 81–96; A. Blok, *The Mafia*, 214–15.

[21] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[22] The B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 135–7, remarks that he was accompanied in the Beni Boudouane pilgrimage by civil and military authorities. At a festival at Khamis Mesbah during the war a general remarked: 'Boualam, it's marvellous: and to think some want to see France depart. It's shameful.' Michel Martini, the communist surgeon of Orleansville, in his memoirs, *Chroniques des annéés algériennes 1946–1962* (Paris: Bouchène, 2002), 41–2, gives a detailed account of his invitation in early 1954 from Le Pêtre, administrator of CM des Braz, to a *taam* in the piedmont of the Zaccar. Press

The official cultivation of an aristocratic *caidat* also suited the conservative *colons* that resisted extension of democratic and equal voting rights to Algerians by appealing to the 'natural' authority of pseudo-tribal chieftains. Said Boualam claimed, 'The people obey, before the administrator, their legitimate chief', and he viewed with trepidation the eventual abolition of the *caidat*, 'the traditional authority' that was venerated by the Muslims.[23]

However, religious gatherings, far from serving as a monopoly of the conservative élites were also adopted by anti-colonial movements. Since the communists and, even more so, the Messalists were subjected to constant police surveillance and harassment, they seized upon every opportunity of ritual social gatherings, weddings, circumcisions, and funerals, to undertake propaganda and to sing nationalist hymns. Any public assembly was subjected to police permission, but the private nature of such gatherings provided a 'cover' for political meetings and ensured relative safety from informers.

Similar in function, but a step down in scale, was provided by the annual cycle of small, local pilgrimages when several hundred peasants from the fraction or *douar* would congregate at the *kouba* of a *marabout* or ancestral saint. These also provided one of the few occasions in the year when the inhabitants, dispersed throughout the *mechtas*, met together in one place, and the fraction chiefs and *djemâa* presidents often seized the opportunity to make a speech or other pronouncements. For example, in September 1950, in what was described as a 'subversive action', men from the fraction of Rabta in the *douar* Main met at the sanctuary of the local saint Sidi Mohamed ben Reknouche to stop tax payments and to create their own independent body in which a mayor, deputy-mayor, and justice (*juge de paix*) were chosen by drawing lots.[24] The communist leader Hadj Mohamed Zitoufi, president of the *djemâa* of Taouiria, habitually used religious festivals to address the crowds, as during Aid-El-Kebir in May 1956, when he spoke at length and asked for collective support for the newly formed guerrilla band (see Chapter 13). Again, in October 1955 the police reported that Bennouna Mammeri, who worked at a cement factory in Algiers, during a visit to his home *douar* of Talassa had carried out nationalist propaganda at a *taam* of the *marabout* Si Abdelhamid.[25] On occasions religious leaders might deploy their

reports of such ceremonies are frequent; see for example *L'Echo d'Alger*, 17 October 1955, report on a *taam* of the *marabout* Sidi Amar at Oued Fodda, attended by three thousand Muslims, the mayor, members of the municipal council, and the *bachagas* Tahar Saiah and Djilali Saiah.

[23] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 44–5. Yazid Ben Hounet, *L'Algérie des tribus*, 331–62, provides, from direct observation during 2000–4, a detailed analysis of the popular festival of Sid-Ahmed Majdub, in the Saharan region of south-west Algeria, which continues to play a role that remains similar to that of the 1940s and 1950s in its organization and role in electoral politics and power-broking. The government of Bouteflika encouraged, not unlike the late colonial state, such '*marabout*' feasts as a counter to dangerous Islamist forces.

[24] AOM 4i209, Lauzon, administrator of CM of Ténès to the prefect of Algiers, 5 October 1950.

[25] AOM 91/5Q/138, RG of Orleansville to RG head of the Algiers district, 31 October 1955.

sacred powers to extend support for the nationalists or particular electoral candidates, as happened in 1951 when the imam of the mosque of Miliana asked visitors to swear on the shrine of Sidi Ahmed Benyoucef that they would vote for the maverick *caid* Bentaieb.[26]

A particularly significant dispute over the control of pilgrimages, which received the full attention of the Governor General Naegelen, took place in 1948–50. One of the most popular pilgrimages was that of the *marabout* Sidi Maamar, located in the mosque of Ténès old town, and which annually attracted devotees from the entire region, and as far away as Algiers.[27] Emile Dermenghem, an eminent scholar of popular rituals, described the unusual customs of Sidi Maamar as a cult of the poor by which the usual high costs of marriage, the dowry exchanges between the families of bride and bridegroom, were reduced to a small, symbolic sum of twenty francs and a spartan ceremony.[28]

The cult of Sidi Maamar was particularly strong in the *douar* of Heumis, to the south of Ténès, which had been penetrated by the MTLD nationalist movement and had elected a *djemâa* headed by a militant president in late 1947. The president, and a second *djemâa* member, were arrested and incarcerated in Orleansville prison during the government repression in advance of the election to the Algerian Assembly, but were released by order of the court. When the Heumis *djemâa* applied on 25 June 1948 for official permission to go on the annual pilgrimage to Ténès on 1 July, the application was refused by the CM administrator on the technical grounds that it was too late since eight days' advance notice was required, but, more to the point, reliable intelligence showed that, 'the gathering at the *marabout* of Sidi Maamar has been organized for political ends, to celebrate the liberation of two members of the *djemâa* of the *douar* Heumis charged with subverting French sovereignty'.[29] As elsewhere, pilgrimages were being used as an excellent opportunity and cover for nationalists to carry out propaganda during large gatherings.

The following year the annual pilgrimage took place, but caused such a scandal that the imam of the mosque of Ténès, where the shrine was located, asked officials to ban it in 1950. The imam's complaint was that pilgrims from the *douar* Heumis had broken all the rules of decency, 'with a lack of respect for the sanctuary by eating, sleeping, men and women mixed together, and replying crudely to comments that were made to this effect'.[30] The imam's objection reflected the traditional dislike of the cultured urban bourgeoisie, as well as the

[26] AOM 91301/53, report CM Braz, October 1951.

[27] It was in this region that the French farmer, Marcel Florenchie, in *Eux et nous*, Vol. 2: *Mémoires d'un colon* (Algiers: P and G. Soubiron, 1934), 119–23, described the striking sight of a column of pilgrims wending its way through the hills near his farm, singing a strange, monotonous song.

[28] Emile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 170–1.

[29] AOM 4i209, order of administrator CM Ténès, 29 June 1948.

[30] AOM 4i209, SLNA Algiers to prefect of Algiers, 9 August 1950.

anti-*marabout* reformism of the *Ulema*, for the uncivilized behaviour of the rude mountain populations.[31] However, despite support for the ban by the Ténès town councillors, the CM administrator and the sub-prefect, the central SLNA intelligence agency under Paul Schoen, advised that the organizers be given a second chance to impose order on the pilgrims.

The SLNA report is of considerable interest since, in defending the pilgrimage, it provides an insight into the way in which the key intelligence agency was concerned to deploy a sympathetic ethnological perspective to reinforce the conservative potential of the *marabouts*. Pilgrimages and *taams*, noted Colonel Schoen, constituted 'authentic manifestations of a profound need in the Arab-Berber' and were among 'the most cherished traditions of the Algerian people. To ban them would be to deny our rural people one of the rare occasions for rejoicing and would indicate an ignorance, if not contempt, for their spiritual needs and can only lead them to regret our presence in this country and to push them closer to those who work against us.' *Maraboutism*, he went on, may have been in decline for several decades under the impact of modern ideas, economic change, and *Ulema* reformism, but it remained a source of stability and it was not for the government to give it the coup de grâce. The SLNA fully recognized that the peasants of the central mountains received little economic aid or development, and that they perceived the modern state, like that of the pre-conquest Turkish absolutism (*beylik*), as a regime that simply plundered their meagre resources:

> Too often the people of the *douars* know the '*beylik*' only in its most unpleasant aspect: conscription, taxes, various censuses, let alone the extorsions for which some agents of the state are still guilty. This situation is typical of the most isolated regions, such as the Dahra. Every opportunity must be seized to put our relations with them on another level, that of trust, respect and good human relations.

The SLNA was aware of the extent to which the hugely popular pilgrimages played a major role in the life of the peasantry, the moments in the year during which populations could briefly escape the interminable daily grind of hard labour and near-famine conditions, in a carnivalesque eruption of dancing, singing, and feasting.[32] Pilgrimages provided an occasion for the local authorities, especially mayors that had little interest in the rural population, to make contact with

[31] See F. Colonna, *Les versets*, 227, 270, 333, on a popular pilgrimage culture that mocked the formality of official religion, defied convention and reverence, and mixed men and women together in a 'vast shambles'.

[32] The safety-valve function of popular festivals has been much studied by historians of early modern Europe influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968); Emmanuel LeRoy-Ladurie, *Carnival: A People's Uprising at Romans, 1579–1580* (London: Scholar, 1980) indicates how such mass rituals of a 'world turned upside down' could serve as a framework for popular revolt.

them and to build up good relations. The SLNA report, on the other hand, appeared to verify the interpretation of communist militants, that an oppressive colonial state was manipulating religion to buttress its power through a bogus supernatural order.

The administrator of the CM of Ammi Moussa, however, opposed the SLNA position, on the grounds that the Heumis pilgrimage had a long history of political opposition that was infecting other parts of the region. The Heumis devotees not only went cross-country every July to Ténès, but in the spring they travelled south across the Chelif River into the *douar* of Touarès in the *commune mixte* of Ammi Moussa (Oranie) where there existed an affiliate shrine (*kouba*) of the saint Sidi-Maamar.[33] In 1947, reported the administrator, the Heumis sect was once again associated with wild disorder that caused panic as the pilgrims descended from the mountains through the settlement of El Alef. It triggered such an 'outrage that some of the European population, seized with panic and fearing that the village would be pillaged, bivouacked all night by hiding in the wheat fields where the grain was already high'.[34] The panic tells us more about the permanent state of paranoia among farmers, their profound anxiety deriving from their sense of isolation and vulnerability, than about the malign intentions of the mountain peasants. But what was particularly worrying for the authorities was that the president of the *djemâa* Touarès, a self-proclaimed *mokhadem* of Sidi Mamaar, was politically suspect. He demonstrated the classic double-face of the loyal supporter of France, who in secret was linked to the 'separatist movements'.

The period from 1944 to early 1948 had seen a significant advance of the nationalist movement into even the most isolated mountain zones, as shown in particular by the *djemâa* elections of 1945 and late 1947 (see Map 4, p. 189). The apparently spontaneous force with which populist nationalism swept through the Dahra was grounded in a great millenarian hope that French domination was about to end. Messali Hadj, far more than the communists, had encouraged this religious trend through his cultivation from 1936 of his image as the great leader, the *zaim*, a bearded prophet-like figure who aroused fervent devotion among the common people. In the Chelif, as elsewhere, militants displayed his image as charismatic leader on posters and postcards. The propaganda of the Messalists, which drifted towards a deepening form of patrimonial authority, leant itself well to the patriarchal and religious organization of peasant society. A small minority of socialist intellectuals like Mohammed Harbi that sought to challenge the conservative implications of religious populism remained marginalized.[35]

[33] E. Dermenghem, *Le culte*, 171; the *taam*, for which he gave an October date, was known as 'Bou Mokhala' since a gun kept in the shrine was believed to fire off, without human intervention, as the feast approached.

[34] AOM 4i209, administrator CM Ammi Moussa to sub-prefect of Mostaganem, 24 October 1950.

[35] This internal division in the MTLD became apparent during the so-called 'Berberist' crisis of 1949, when a laicist current, strong among Kabyle militants, that wished to dissociate nationalism from

Harbi notes that unlike the communists that faced the difficult problem of diffusing an ideology, the Messalists found roots in a religiosity that was an integral feature of popular culture and the structures of everyday life.[36]

Schoen's 1950 report on the Heumis pilgrimage, matching those of the CM administrators in 1952–3, was indicative of a trend of the Algiers government to counter this threat after 1948 by cultivating support for the traditional *marabout* élites. The communists in the Chelif region were perfectly aware of this attempt by the Algiers government to manipulate the conservative potential of *maraboutism* in order to contain the advance of radical anti-colonialism. They responded by a counter-strategy in which they attempted to intercept and propagandize what was among the biggest and most famous of the great annual pilgrimages, that to the shrine of Sidi Ahmed Benyoucef in Miliana.[37] On the 2 May 1950 some six thousand pilgrims arrived, as they did every year, in columns from the mountainous interior to make a juncture and to camp overnight near the Oued Ebda just north of Duperré, where they were addressed by the mayor and the CM administrator, Escoffier.

At about 6 o'clock in the evening a group of communist militants from Duperré, led by Keddar, Embarek, and Chouchaouia, along with the architect Abderrahmane Bouchama, addressed the pilgrims. They claimed the right to intercede in a religious festival because the Governor General had politicized the event by sending a propaganda team with a mobile cinema unit. The administrator, fearing a major disturbance, asked the communists to leave, and on their refusal had them physically dispersed by the gendarmes. As they departed the communists appealed to the pilgrims to follow them, which some twenty men did.[38]

When calm was restored Murati, head of the cinema propaganda team, played religious disks and projected five films, the *African Army*, *Pilgrimage to Mecca*, the *Art of Algeria*, the *Rearing of Sheep*, and the inauguration by the Governor General of a statue to Abdelkader.[39] The latter, an attempt by the colonial regime to

religious faith, was defeated by an 'Arabo-Islamic' current that was to become dominant during and after the War of Independence: see M. Harbi, *Le FLN*, 59–67.

[36] M. Harbi, *Une vie debout*, 74. He also notes that the MTLD in his native Philippeville (Skikda) never openly attacked popular religion and its leaders and, while it condemned *maraboutism* in private, readily participated in the great pilgrimages to Zef-Zef and Ben Zouit. Later Harbi came to recognize the disastrous long-term implications of Messalist support for conservative religion in the failure to construct a post-war democratic order.

[37] E. Dermenghem, *Culte des saints*, 226–9, gives a first hand, colourful account of the Miliana shrine, including the tomb of a mule to which devotees made an offering of barley in order to cure various illnesses of the hand and foot. Some pilgrims travelled thousands of kilometres from across the Maghreb, while from within the region they arrived at different times of the year, from Bou Maad and Zaccar in July after the harvest, and from Djendel in December following the winter sowing.

[38] AOM 1K/402, reports of Duperré police, 3 May 1950; RG Miliana, 4 May 1950.

[39] On colonial propaganda and mobile cinema, see Sébastien Denis, 'Les "cinébus" dans la tourmente. Projections cinématographiques et montée de l'anticolonialisme en milieu rural algérien (1945–1962)', *Revue des mondes musulmanes et de la Méditerranée* 130 (2012), 201–14.

recuperate the great hero of anti-French resistance, was particularly provocative to the nationalists who later succeeded in dynamiting the monument. The communist *Alger républicain* gave a rather different version of events by claiming that the intervention by the *Combattants de la paix*, as part of the communist drive for global peace and against American Cold War militarism, had gained a thousand pilgrim signatures for a petition on the Stockholm Resolution to ban nuclear weapons.[40]

Although the pilgrimage to Miliana drew in thousands of peasants the organization of the event, which required a degree of bureaucratic planning including liaison with the police and local authorities, was in the hands of a committee that included anti-communist members, among them Larbi Benbachir, deputy mayor of Duperré, and Ahmed Hadj. The latter, an ex-communist militant who had left the PCA in 1949, later became secretary to the *djemâa* of Bouzehar after the government had dissolved the Keddar-led *djemâa* after a long court battle. The arrangements made for the mayor of Duperré, the CM administrator and conservative *marabouts* to welcome and address the pilgrims shows the extent to which the event was orchestrated by urban-based conservatives, and the communist riposte was also one led by urban militants. However, participation was also organized at the local level in the *douars* by the fraction headmen and *djemâas*. It is difficult to assess the impact of communist propaganda on the pilgrims, but clearly both the urban-based colonial authorities and nationalist militants were engaged in a propaganda war for the 'peasant soul'.

The *Ulema* and Rural Religion

So far this chapter might seem to confirm the idea that peasant society in the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains remained strongly attached to a magical view of the world, a universe dominated by the belief in the power of saints, holy amulets, witchcraft, and spells. There would appear to be an obvious contradiction between the puritan ideology of the urban-based *Ulema* and what they viewed as the degraded world of peasant superstition and *maraboutism*.[41] Historians interested in the sociology of the *Ulema* have tended to see it as a movement that found its strongest support in an urban milieu of petite bourgeois intellectuals and shopkeepers, an educated class that rejected the mystical populism of the poor for a

[40] *Alger républicains*, 3 May 1950. The communists engaged in an identical intervention during the pilgrimage of 1951.

[41] A. Merad, *Le réformisme musulman*, 109, quotes an early 'Appel aux lettrés réformistes' by Ben Badis, 26 November 1925, in which he called for a movement 'of which the aim will be to purify religion of the superstitions and false beliefs introduced by the ignorant, and to favour the return to Koranic and prophetic sources . . .'.

more rational, puritanical, and scriptural Islam.[42] Anomalous as it may seem, I will argue that the *Ulema*, which initially held a conservative position on social reform, did succeed in penetrating into the peasantry of the mountains and contributed to the creation of the clandestine networks that later morphed into guerrilla organizations.

Before looking at this evidence, some general considerations about what made this bridge-over possible. The *Ulema* and the *marabouts* and sufi brotherhoods were not necessarily in total opposition, as has often been suggested. Ben Badis maintained courteous and friendly relations with the *marabouts* and during his first propaganda tour of 1931 made a point of visiting and entering into a dialogue with the religious centres (*zaouia*) in the Chelif valley.[43] Fanny Colonna demonstrated the force with which 'Ben Badism' succeeded in penetrating the isolated Aurès mountains from the 1930s onwards.[44] There seems to have been nothing to prevent peasants who lived within a universe of magic and saintly intercession becoming rapidly converted to a puritanical faith, just as mountain societies in early modern Europe converted to Calvinism and swept aside the old order with iconoclastic fury. Popular Reformism, which included a puritanical rejection of tobacco, alcohol, and conspicuous consumption, fuelled the rebellion against the way of life of the corrupt Europeans and their collaborators.[45]

In May 1931 the reformist leader Abdelhamid Ben Badis founded the *Association des oulamas musulmans algériens* (AOMA) in Constantine, and soon after he came on a first proselytizing tour that included stops in the Chelif at Miliana, Affreville, and Orleansville.[46] By the late 1930s the *Ulema* were beginning to make an impact in the towns of the region, and in 1939 a cultural circle, the *Nadi el islah* was opened in Orleansville under its President Zerrouki.[47] However, the main phase of advance came with the foundation of two *medersas*, *El Khaldounia*, established in Orleansville on 17 February 1942, and

[42] A. Merad, *Le réformisme musulman*, 180; Fanny Colonna, 'Cultural Resistance and Religious Legitimacy in Colonial Algeria', *Economy and Society* 3 (1974), 237.

[43] A. Merad, *Le réformisme musulman*, 87, 126. As Merad notes, p. 66, the brotherhoods gradually adapted a modernist spirit.

[44] F. Colonna, *Les versets*; and 'Religion, politique et culture(s), quelle problématique de la nation?', *Insaniyat. Revue algérienne d'anthropologie et de sciences sociales* 47–8 (2010), 23–33; Mohammed el Korso, 'Structures islahistes et dynamique culturelle dans le mouvement national Algérien 1931–1954', in Omar Carlier, Fanny Colonna, El Korso Djeghloul (eds), *Lettrés, intellectuels et militants en Algérie, 1880–1950* (Algiers: OPU, 1988), 54–106, shows how a goal of the AOMA was to carry its message into rural areas, primarily through the *medersa* rather than the mosque.

[45] The Orleansville police reported in June 1955 that 'agitators' who were placing pressure to boycott tobacco, cinemas, and European cafés were having little success, but within a week the campaign was having an impact in the region. The administrator of the CM of Cherchell remarked in early July that the FLN order was being scrupulously followed in the towns, both from fear of reprisals and also from 'a religious sentiment marked by mysticism and fanaticism': AOM 9140/175, Orleansville RG to sub-prefect, 25 June 155; AOM 1K/418, CM Cherchell, 2 July 1955.

[46] Ali Merad, *Le reformisme musulman*, 126.

[47] AOM 4i206, CIE, Algiers, 21 July 1939. Zerrouki was described as having communist sympathies.

Dar-el-Mancif, set up in Ténès on 30 October 1944, along with an associated circle, *Nadi el Irchad* created in 1947. The *medersas* grew in response to the explosive force of post-Liberation nationalism and were an expression of the *Ulema* ideology that laid claim to Arab language and history as central to a cultural renaissance and the assertion of an Algerian national identity.[48]

Both schools quickly attracted the attention of the police as centres of anti-French activity, and during the decade 1944–54 they educated a generation of students that were later to play a major role in the armed struggle. The Director of *El Khaldounia* Djilali Henni Adda encouraged pupils to sing nationalist hymns and to stage anti-French theatrical sketches, and at a large gathering of the association, attended by seven hundred guests, he exhorted the audience to sacrifice themselves in order to create a 'free nation'.[49] The situation at the *Dar-el-Mancif* of Ténès was similar but, in this case, we have a remarkable study carried out by a police officer, Michel Baroin in December 1956, who, with access to police, gendarmes and army archives, interrogation reports, and documents captured from the *medersa*, was able to reconstruct the history of the school between 1944 and 1956, its clandestine organization and network in Ténès society, and how it laid the foundations for two FLN cells in the town and the complex networks that reached out into the interior to supply and sustain the maquis.[50]

By late 1956, through numerous arrests and interrogations, the police had identified the key FLN leaders, Commandant Benhammadi, El Hadj Eddahra, Mustapha Bekhat, and Belaid Otman, the nineteen members of the two Ténès cells, the liaison agents that maintained contact with Algiers, Cherchell, and Orleansville, and their regular points of liaison in Ténès, including a transport garage, a hairdresser, a taylor's shop, several cafés, and a *hammam*. The majority of those in the FLN network had a background in the *medersa*, as members of the administrative council, as financial backers, graduate students, and related associates and family members. Many of the leaders belonged to an educated, bourgeois élite, that had a respected and established position in the small-town society

[48] J. McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*; A. Merad, *Le reformisme musulman*, 290–8. On the *medersa* schools, see John Damis, 'The Free-School Phenomenon: The Cases of Tunisia and Algeria', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5.4 (1974), 434–49.

[49] AOM 4i206, report RG Orleans 1 August 1953. By 1956 he was being held in an internment centre. Henni-Adda, also known as Djillali El Farissi, or '*cheikh* El Boudali', born in the *douar* Ouled Farès 28 October 1909, died in 1994: see *El Watan*, 26 June 2008.

[50] AOM 4i206, report of Ténès *commissaire de police* Baroin to prefect of Orleansville, 28 December 1956. Michel Baroin, as a Science-Po student had in 1951 carried out research on Moroccan nationalism under the supervision of the notable specialist Charles-André Julien. Baroin's unusual report reads more like the work of an academic sociologist than that of a junior police officer. In late 1956 he was accidently wounded by a gunshot, and returned to France where he was to achieve later distinction in the secret service (DST), as sub-prefect, director of cabinet to two Presidents of the National Assembly, head of the Freemasonic *Grand Orient de France*, and head of two major companies, GMF and FNAC. He died in mysterious circumstances in an air crash on 5 February 1987 after a meeting with President Denis Sassou-Nguesso in Brazzaville. See Jean-Michel Blanquer, *Michel Baroin. Les secrets d'une influence* (Paris: Plon, 1992).

of Ténès, as town councillors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and small businessmen. Baroin was shocked to find the extent to which the FLN network extended into the police, judiciary, post office, town hall, *commune mixte*, hospital, and elsewhere, effecting an infiltration of the public services.

However, there was a more plebeian element, especially active in the associated cultural circle *Nadir el Irchad*, that had extended its work with youth by establishing the *Association sportive Moumoudia club*, and the Scout group '*Es-salam*'.[51] Among the members of the council of *Nadir el Irchad* we find traders in fish and poultry, a taylor, a cook, a blacksmith, a hospital worker, and the owner of a cycle shop. Quite typical of the circle group was Otman Belaid, who in 1948 was a town councillor, vice president of *Nadir el Irchad*, and who had the honour of making a speech to welcome Messali Hadj when he visited Ténès on 4 July 1948, according to a police report, 'notably wishing him a long life so that he could live to see the liberation of North Africa'.[52] By March 1951 Belaid was deputy mayor of Ténès and described as the 'brains'('*cerveau*') of the clandestine organization that met in his taylor's shop.[53] In June 1954 Belaid, one of the group that prepared the 1 November insurrection, sent a message to Krimi Abderrahmane, an ex-*medersa* pupil then working in France, to return to Ténès to help create a maquis in his home *douar* of Taourira.[54] At some stage Belaid also joined the maquis and by late 1956 had achieved fame as the head of the guerrilla forces in the Dahra mountains.[55]

The main interest here is to explore the issue of how the urban-based nationalist movement sought specifically to extend its religious propaganda into the rural area. What the Baroin report shows very clearly is the extent to which the forms of anti-colonial militancy that developed in Ténès between 1944 and 1954 were able to use legal religious organizations and associations as a cover for clandestine activity. This, however, was not only an opportunist or instrumental strategy, since the *Ulema*-Messalist culture was inspired by a powerful religious, and even Messianic, vision of liberation, and by the early 1950s the nationalists were seeking, rather like missionaries, to carry this message into the mountains.[56]

[51] On the importance of sports clubs, especially football, and scouting, in the expansion of the nationalist youth movement see O. Carlier, *Entre nation et jihad*, 46–57; A. Merad, *Le reformisme musulman*, 265–9.

[52] AOM 4i209, Ténès police report, 5 July 1948. In November 1948 Belaid was president of a clandestine meeting of the circle that organized distribution of the illegal journal, 'L'Étoile algérienne'.

[53] Artisan workshops, and especially those of taylors, served a key role for nationalist debate and organization: see F. Colonna, *Les versets*, 291–2.

[54] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 36–7, 41. [55] AOM 4i209, Baroin Report, 28 December 1956.

[56] The Baroin Report, AOM 4i209, illustrates the spirit of revolt in the religious circles by quoting at length from a letter written by El Foul Lautry, an ex-student of the *medersa*, to the son of the imam of the Vieux Ténès mosque. In this he details the exploitative nature of the colonial system, but also his personal spiritual suffering under the heel and injustice of foreigners who would not allow him to enjoy, 'a culture true to my traditions, that my language is a foreign thing in my own country. . . . I live in a climate in which I feel uncomfortable, oppressed, under surveillance, spied on, stricken with fear,

As Fanny Colonna warned, there is a danger in interpreting such religious movements as essentially a mask or camouflage for political or class interests, since Islam, a total and self-contained system, offered the dominant language of resistance, in which the *Ulema* saw themselves primarily as 'guardians of the faith' rather than as political militants.[57]

One of the ways in which the *Ulema* message reached the interior was not only through urban missionaries, but also through the sons of devout peasants or *marabout* families who, after migrating to the centres of religious learning in Constantine, Tunisia, and Morocco, returned to bring the message into their home village.[58] This pattern can be found in the Chelif, where *medersa* students played a key role in the formation of rural nationalist cells.

As early as July 1939 police reports noted that the most active propagandist of the *Ulema* in the Chelif region was the 28-year-old *cheikh* Ahmed el Djilali ben Naimi from the *douar* of Ouled Djellal, south of Biskra, who had studied for a year at the Islamic centre of Zitouna in Tunisia, then at Constantine, almost certainly in the Ben Badis school. The police described him as a, 'violent propagandist of the reformist doctrine'.[59] In September 1955 a police report on a maquis group near Molière identified Mohamed Hennad, born in the mountain *douar* of Beni Boukhannous in January 1918, who had studied in a *medersa* in Tunis, before returning when, under police surveillance, he moved in 1948 to Oran to teach in a *medersa* that was later closed for political reasons. Hennad was in 1955 *taleb* of a Koranic school in the *douar* Amari in the Sersou, on the Saharan fringes of the Ouarsenis, and in constant touch with the nationalist leader Hadj Athmane.[60]

One of the most important functions of the *medersa* in the Chelif was to have formed hundreds of students who, inspired by the religious message of liberation, carried this into the countryside.[61] Of particular importance were those who went on to become teachers in the shanty towns and mountain villages where they inculcated a nationalist culture among the post-war generation. As Colonna has shown in detail, from the First World War onwards academics showed little

gripped by pain and my silent revolt. . . . I suffer from this state of affairs in my sense of honour first as a free man, as an Arab. . . . '

[57] F. Colonna, 'Cultural Resistance', 233–4, 238; and Jean-Claude Vatin, 'Religious Resistance and State Power in Algeria', ch. 8 in Alexander S. Cudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds), *Islam and Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 19–57.

[58] F. Colonna, 'Réligion, politique', 28; F. Abbas, *La nuit coloniale*, 204, notes of Algerian students returning from Tunis and Cairo, 'made Arab identity and the renaissance of Islam as the prime conditions for a national resurgence. Their audience among the rural population was considerable.'

[59] AOM 4 i 206, Report CIE, Algiers, 21 July 1939.

[60] AOM 91/5Q/138, *police judiciaire*, *brigade mobile* Orleansville to *brigades mobiles* Algiers, 14 September 1955.

[61] There are evident parallels between the key role of the religious teachers (*talebs*) in the formation of the ALN, and the hundreds of *madrasa*-trained militants that went to form the core of the Afghan Taliban; on the latter, see Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan 2001–2014* (London: Vintage, 2017), 27–8.

interest in the religion of the countryside, the forms of '*maraboutism*' that were dismissed as superstitious and pagan customs of passing folkloric interest. This was seen as a static, closed system, a 'scriptural' religion without books, that bore no meaningful relation to the learned Islam of the town.[62] The impoverished Koranic schools of the countryside have been most often portrayed as places of rote learning of the Koran, enforced by beating on the soles of the feet (*falaqa*), and which did nothing, unlike the French school, to prepare the sons of peasants for the job market and locked them into an immutable world of medieval poverty. But, as Colonna argues, this stereotypical picture needs to be challenged. The Koranic school was regarded by parents as crucial to the formation of a religious identity, through which reciting the Koran, the '*parole de Dieu*', provided a sacred protection in future life, especially against the dangers of being corrupted by, and assimilated into, the universe of the French unbeliever (*roumi*).[63] Autobiographical accounts often confirm this interpretation of the experience of the Koranic school as a vital source of identity, of Arab culture, and in the words of the communist, Sadek Hadjeres, 'a life-jacket for a ship-wrecked nation'.[64]

Secondly, the Koranic school was not necessarily, as usually claimed, a stultifying institution but often had teachers of sufficient talent and dedication to produce students literate in Arabic, who could go on to further study in a *medersa*, or one of the universities of the Maghreb or Middle East. In this sense the rural Koranic school, often located in a *gourbis* without basic facilities, was not always a dead-end, especially as a new generation of young *talebs* began to emerge from the *medersas* that taught a more modern curriculum.[65] During the 1940s many sons of peasants in the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains, if they showed promise in the local Koranic school, would go on to undertake further education, becoming peripatetic, often during many years, between Algerian *medersas* and the great religious centres of Tunisia and Morocco, before returning to teach in the villages.[66]

[62] F. Colonna, *Les versets*, ch. 3.

[63] The title of Fanny Colonna's book, *Les versets de l'invincibilité*, derives from this sense of a religious shield against all adversity, rendering the pupil 'invincible'. Colonna refers here to the case of the father of a Koranic student in the Ouarsenis *c.*1921 who, faced with the dilemma of his son accepting a scholarship for a French teaching college, or continuing his religious studies to become a *cheikh*, consulted the pious *taleb* and *marabout*. He replied, that he should attend the French school since he was now 'invincible'. *Les versets*, 10–11. The original, more detailed version in Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens 1883–1939* (Paris: Presses de la FNSP, 1975), 90, is rather different, and translates the term as '*inaltérable*'.

[64] S. Hadjerès, *Quand une nation s'éveille*, 55–6.

[65] Sadek Hadjerès, 'Quatre generation. Deux cultures', in *La Nouvelle Critique* (1960), online at <http://www.socialgerie.net>, in contradiction to the standard depiction of the Koranic school as a stultifying institution, claims that he, along with thousands of rural children denied access to the modern French school, learned to read and write in the 'national language'.

[66] There existed a long religious tradition by which gifted sons of peasant families, after initial training in the Koranic school, would migrate (*rihla*), often for many years, through the religious centres and places of learning of Algeria, the Maghreb, and the Middle East. In the process many came into contact with reformism and nationalist movements, especially in the *medersa* of Ben Badis in

We have good evidence on this from the memoirs of Abderrahmane Krimi, born in the *douar* Taouira east of Ténès in 1928, and raised in a poor but large extended family of thirty-five to forty members. His basic Koranic studies continued from age 5 to 12, by which time he had achieved the prized goal of studying the entire text of the Koran, when he moved to Ténès to study jurisprudence, founded on the classic work of Sidi Khellil, with *cheikh* Boubekeur. From there he went on to study under the master Djillai Farissi in the *medersa* El-Khaldounia in Orleansville, before opting to study in the famous Arab university of El-Qarawin in Fès from 1948 to 1951. When Krimi travelled to Morocco, part of the journey in a cattle wagon, it was with ten other young scholars from the Chelif region.[67] As a young scholar Krimi came into contact with nationalists in both the Chelif and Morocco, including Othmane Belaid of the Ténès *medersa*, who later recruited him to form the first FLN maquis in the Dahra, where he went on to become a leading officer in the ALN.

The Koranic schools, primitive as they may have appeared to the Europeans, also provided for most peasant children the only form of education available to them.[68] The most complete data that we have on rural education in the Chelif region comes from a PACs survey of 1946 for the *commune mixte* of Chelif which shows that French schools, mainly for European children, existed only in the five townships of Bougainville, Lamartine, Malakoff, Masséna, and Warnier. In the eighteen mountain *douars*, with the exception of three 'native schools' in the piedmont at Beni Rached, Medjadja, and Guerboussa, there were fifty-three Koranic schools, with a total of 938 boys and twenty girls.[69] The administrator estimated that in the townships, of 467 children of school-leaving age, 115 (24.6 per cent) found a place in a French school, but in the interior where there were 14,541 children, only 112 (0.77 per cent) attended a French school, and 958 (6.6 per cent) a Koranic school.[70] Only seven in a hundred children may have attended a Koranic school, but those who achieved a basic knowledge of the Koran often carried prestige and influence in a highly religious society, respected for their

Constantine, and carried these radical influences back into their home region. See J. McDougall, *Culture of Nationalism*, ch. 1; F. Colonna, *Les versets*, ch. 9.

[67] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 14–21. This gives an indication of the scale of the movement of rural youths through the religious centres of North Africa.

[68] On schooling in general, see Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens 1883–1939* (Paris: Presses de la foundation nationale des sciences politiques, 1975); Aissa Kadri (ed.), *Instituteurs et enseignants en Algérie 1945–1975* (Paris: Karthala, 2014); A. Ghouati, *École et imaginaire*.

[69] AOM 4i206, report of sub-prefect of Orleansville to prefect of Algiers, 29 August 1951, indicates that there were eighty-three Koranic schools with 1,385 pupils in the CM of Chelif, which suggests that they had expanded significantly since 1946 and may have corresponded—as other sources indicate—to a phase of religious revivalism and millenarian fervour in the countryside.

[70] AOM 1Y113, PACs report on scolarization, 6 August 1946. The PACs report for the *douar* Lardjem notes that in the total population there were twenty-five literate in French and two hundred in Arabic, in Beni Hindel, fifty to three hundred, and in Beni Ouazane, forty to five hundred. The term '*lettrés*' is not defined, but may indicate a basic ability to write in the language.

wisdom and powers of intercession. Many peasant families were proud to see a son rise to the status of *taleb* or imam, just as devout Catholics in Europe aspired to have at least one priest in their family.

Information on whether nationalist influences tracked their way into the mountains through the Koranic schools is fragmentary, but sufficient to build up a picture of the process. Each Koranic school was required to register with the authorities, part of a system of surveillance, but the 1946 PACs survey revealed that half of the schools (twenty-five out of fifty-three) were undeclared or 'clandestine', and the correspondence of CM administrators indicated that they had very little information so that others may have escaped detection entirely.[71] The officials, usually very exact in bureaucratic procedure, appear to have been quite lax in their control, perhaps a reflection of the fact that they were not particularly concerned by the potential political dangers of schools that were seen as in the safe hands of conservative, pro-French *marabouts*. This lack of attention served the *Ulema* nationalists well as they engaged in a missionary drive into the *douars*.[72]

By late 1952 the *Ulema* had established three associations (sections) in the piedmont *douars* of Ouled Farès, Tsighaout, and Medjadja, the latter under the presidency of Mohammed Ben Bahloul El Bouali, a farmer and head of a Koranic school.[73] There is some evidence that the *Ulema* were perfectly happy to work with, or to extend their influence in the Chelif region, through the traditional sufi brotherhoods, in particular the Chadoulia order. One centre of pilgrimage was the shrine of Sidi Salah ben Ahmed ben Mansour in the *douar* Temdrara, and at a meeting there on 8 February 1951 followers or descendants of the saint met to establish the *Association Essalhia*, an organization concerned with religious education.[74] The president, Commander Mohamed Benhammadi, was a leading figure in the Ténès *medersa*, of which he was honorary president in 1954. In December 1956 Baroin identified Benhammadi, former town councillor and deputy mayor, president of the *Association des anciens combattants*, and a prominent figure in Ténès society, as the head of FLN operations in the region.[75]

[71] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 318–28, examines the draconian regulation imposed on private Muslim schools, and the severe financial penalties and prison sentences imposed for non-compliance. Despite this the total number of schools in Algeria increased from 2,542 in 1933 to 3,148 in 1938, while pupil numbers increased from 36,305 to 50,293.

[72] AOM 1Y113, most surprising is the extraordinary high number of fourteen Koranic schools in the *douar* Beni Ouazane, thirteen of which were unregistered. This tribe had a particularly turbulent history in terms of resistance to the Turkish authorities, and then in supporting Abdelkader against the French, and during the great millenarian revolt of Bou Maza. Since 1847, noted Rohrbacher, they had been 'correct' towards the French, but the inhabitants were hostile to the one European farmer located in the *douar*, who had to be protected, and the administrator feared a peasant revolt here like that at Sétif in May 1945. The proliferation of Koranic schools was probably linked to the fact that the Chadoulia brotherhood had established a *zaouia* here in 1938.

[73] AOM 4i206, sub-prefect to prefect of Algiers, 30 December 1952.

[74] AOM 4i197, Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique*, 30 December 1952.

[75] A photograph from the 1950s shows Commandant Benhammadi, crew-cut and in a military style shirt, sitting at a long table with the conservative mayor Jérome Bortolotti and other *colons*, during an

Baroin, who seized the archives of the *medersa* Dar-el-Moncif, was able to uncover some of the trackways through which this vibrant centre of nationalism organized a network that extended outwards into the Ténès region, and by 1955–6 various ex-pupils and associates, Djebbour, Draini, Souakri, and Feraoui, were liaison agents, often owners of taxis, cars, or commercial vans, that delivered supplies to the maquis.

The Chadoulia brotherhood, which had a major base and *zaouia* at Carnot, was reported in 1946 to have had the most extensive network of followers throughout the Chelif region, and spanned into some of the most isolated *douars*. Ten years later in 1956 the head of the SLNA intelligence agency reported that the insurrection had led to a surge in religious practice, as at Teniet el Haad, where very few inhabitants failed to publicly show their solidarity with the rebellion by attending the mosque. 'Solidarity with the Muslim world is asserted more and more.' The mosque was one of the few places in which large groups could assemble and which the authorities found difficult to control or ban, as in this instance when the head of the Chadoulia *zaouia*, Hadj Larbi Barbara, sailed close to the wind, preaching, 'it is the duty of every Muslim not to enter into conflict with his brother-in-religion', which was interpreted by his audience as an invitation to support the rebels or, at least, not to inform on them.[76]

As the war deepened in the Chelif between 1954 and 1957, so the number of incidents and reports of masters of Koranic schools, most of them trained in the local *medersa* or *zaouia* of Ténès, Orleansville, Carnot, and Medjadja, engaging in acts of resistance increased. Benyoucef Ben Djillali Kacher, head of the Koranic school in the fraction Zemoul Oued Fodda, taught his pupils 'an intense propaganda in favour of the rebellion'. His son Abdelkader, head of the MNA in the Attaf region, was sentenced on 11 April 1957 to seven years of prison by the tribunal in Orleansville.

The number of *talebs* that came to play a leading role in the formation of the early maquis appears to have been particularly dense in the western Dahra. For example the MTLD militant *cheikh* Ben Eddine Zerrouki, who was born in the *douar* Dahra in 1917, after teaching in the *medersa* of Mostaganem, later opened an illegal school and was sentenced to four years of prison and a fine of 250,000 francs for subversive activities. He appears to have gone to Lyons for a while, before turning to serve, probably as an MNA officer, under the pseudonym

official celebration: see http://tenes.info/galerie/FEREDJ/. Benhammadi was typical of a class of urban notables who, while supporting the FLN, escaped arrest by remaining part of the local colonial establishment; AOM 1K/1179, secret RG report Orleansville, 12 July 1958, noted that he was a member of the departmental *Commission administrative*, a *délégué spécial* in the commune of Reggoun, and, despite the fact that since 1954 he had 'adopted a rather changeable opinion and was at times under suspicion', he was classified as 'loyal'.

[76] AOM 4i204, SLNA Algiers, 13 December 1956.

'Si Abderrahmane'.[77] Likewise Mohamed Ben Ali Zegai, who came from Ténès, master of the school in the fraction Brahienne Oued Fodda, subjected his pupils to an intense propaganda and it was thought that his students had carried out terrorist attacks in the region.[78] On the night of 3–4 June 1955 six pupils of the Koranic school 'Kenensa' near Rabelais (Ain Merane), where the *taleb* was the 65-year-old Mohamed Ben Tayeb Niati, had destroyed 516 vine stocks on two farms.[79]

A police survey of the Koranic schools in March 1957 found that fifty-nine were still open, most of them 'more or less' under FLN influence and engaged in nationalist propaganda.[80] An informative report relates how *cheikh* Hadj ben Bouziane Henouni, head of a Koranic school in the *douar* Ouled Abdalla, west of Ténès, had housed an FLN unit of twenty armed men on the night of 21 August 1956, prior to their burning down several farms. A gendarmes operation had led to the killing of eleven FLN guerrillas and the arrest of fifty-eight men, presumably local peasants, and 300,000 francs and various arms and supplies were found in Henouni's house. Interrogations revealed that the *cheikh* was 'known to be the real source of authority in the fraction and his profession gives him a great spiritual status. Moreover he looks after the affairs of many Muslims in the region that have full trust in him. His authority is explained by the fact that this region followed a *Ulema* or reformist tendency from the start.'[81] There is a sense here of how the teacher of a Koranic school, because of his spiritual authority as master of the '*parole de Dieu*', could be endowed with a high level of respect and authority, a power that extended to his role as adjudicator over local issues, and which would have given him considerable influence among peasants who came to support the nationalist struggle.

The most renowned of the holy sites in the mid-Chelif was, beyond doubt, the dual saintly shrines of the Saiah clan in the adjacent *douars* of Medjadja and Beni Rached (see Chapter 4). The pilgrimages to the *douars* served to reinforce the conservative influence of the Saiah family which, by 1946, still retained a degree of charismatic authority among the rural population throughout a large area. For example, inhabitants of the *douars* of Tsighaout, Beni Ouazane, and Temdrara, attached to the *caid* Benbouli, from a junior-branch of the Saiah, continued to make an annual pilgrimage from the piedmont fringes of the Ouarsenis, across the Chelif River, and up to Medjadja. But during the 1940s the twin *douars* of Medjadja and Beni Rached became major centres of both *Ulema* and communist

[77] AOM 9140/152, Mostaganem RG intelligence report, 5 September 1956.
[78] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, 16 April 1957.
[79] AOM 9140/175, RG Orleansville, 7 June 1955.
[80] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, 15 March 1957.
[81] AOM 1K874, RG Orleansville, 3 September 1956. Henouni was on the run, but his brother was killed during the operation.

activity, and the hub of the communist maquis during 1955–6. Here again the network of religious affiliations and Koranic schools played a major role.

The peasants of the two *douars* had, from the nineteenth century, developed a comparatively high level of literacy in both Arabic and French, and a modernist culture that was, in many ways, comparable to that of the Kabyle region. This was partly due to the fact that the Saiah had encouraged the foundation of French-Arab schools in Medjadja in 1864, and in Beni Rached in 1910, with one exception the only such schools in the mid-Chelif. The formation of several generations of children who were literate in French enabled villagers to achieve upward social mobility through employment in the administration and public service. At the same time, although the history of the *zaouia* of Medjadja is unclear, the prominence of the mosque and the religious shrines sustained an intense religious culture that, in turn, supported the proliferation of Koranic schools. Rohrbacher identified in 1946 150 inhabitants literate in French and 1,000 in Arabic, alongside some forty '"*cheiks*" or "*Oulémas*"', and in 1952 fifteen Koranic schools.[82] This suggests an unusually high level of literacy in Arabic, about one in eight of the total population of 8,513, or a quarter of all males.

This relatively higher level of education explains in part the outstanding politicization of the *douar*, but a further factor derived from the close geographical proximity to the plain. Medjadja was connected to Orleansville by a metalled road, and labourers made the daily descent in flotillas of bicycles either to work in the market gardens or in various occupations in the town which was ten miles away. Many families moved down permanently to colonize the shanty towns and suburbs of Orleansville, in particular the peripheral centre of La Ferme, located on the north bank of the Chelif River and closest to Medjadja. These peri-urban residents retained close ties to their parents or other kin in Medjadja, and as La Ferme developed into a hotbed of nationalism, political networks connected the rural-urban zones and favoured the exchange of ideas. It would seem that the religious centre of Medjadja Beni Rached trained Islamic scholars to a level in Arabic where they could move on to the *medersas* in Orleansville and qualify to head Koranic schools in the burgeoning shanty towns of Orleansville and neighbouring *douars*. For example, Elhabib ben Mostefa Hadj Henni, born in Medjadja in 1897, received authorization to open a Koranic school with twenty-five pupils in the *bidonvilles* of Bocca Sahnoune in 1944. Ahmed ben Aissa Rahal, born in Beni Rached, opened a school with sixty pupils in the same location in 1950.[83]

[82] AOM 4i197, Rohrbacher, *Monographie politique*, 30 December 1952, states fifteen schools.

[83] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, report on Koranic schools in the *arrondissements* of Orleansville and Ténès, 15 March 1957. The report identifies the place of origin of forty-four teachers (*talebs*), of which thirteen (30 per cent) came from Medjadja and Beni Rached. At least half of the forty-four came from piedmont *douars*, suggesting a significant movement from hill to plain that no doubt reflected a pattern of family migration to the urban centres.

Instead of conceptualizing the socio-cultural geography of the mid-Chelif as one of an urban-rural dualism, it makes more sense to visualize a single space in which individuals constantly circulated through multifarious networks that joined the two zones. By 1946–52 the *Ulema* had established a formal section in Medjadja that would have been in close touch with the *medersa* El-Khaldounia, through which nationalist influences flowed. By 1955–6 the Medjadja group was liaising with the communists as they built up a sophisticated clandestine organization in all eighteen of the *douar* fractions.[84]

This latter collaboration should remind us that grassroots anti-colonial politics was not divided along rigid party lines, as is the impression often left by historians who provide a 'top-down' version of the nationalist movement, but involved a constant and fluid exchange between individuals who shared the close face-to-face contact of provincial society. The peasant leader Tahar Ghomri, for example, made the transition from *Ulema* supporter to communist militant with ease.[85] There was a degree of homology between the puritanical, petit-bourgeois ideology of the *Ulema*, which discarded the superstitious practices of the *marabouts* for a more rational scriptural culture, and that of the class of artisans, shopkeepers, and public sector militants of the PCA.[86] Both *Ulema* and PCA could be in agreement in their opposition to the more 'pagan' and archaic features of *maraboutism*, including the pilgrimages, but this did not necessarily represent a Manichaean opposition between urban rationality and modernism, and the magical world of the peasantry, since the underlying logic of *Ulema* puritanism was rapidly spreading into the most isolated *douars* through Koranic schools in which the masters had been trained in the new *medersas*.[87]

[84] N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 534; S. Kastell, *Le Maquis Rouge*, 240–2.

[85] M. El Korso, 'Structures islahistes', 73, notes that the communists were fully involved with Reformism, ran their own religious circles, and placed a major emphasis on Arab language and history.

[86] F. Colonna, *Les versets*, 280.

[87] The ethnologist Jean Servier, *Dans l'Aurès*, 8–9, while carrying out fieldwork on the eve of the 1 November 1954 revolt in the isolated Aurès mountains, claimed that *Ulema* propaganda had completely diffused into peasant society, and its partisans had banned the cult of saints, singing, dancing, and the smoking of cigarettes.

PART III

ORGANIZATION OF THE EARLY MAQUIS

Rebel Governance and Formation of the FLN Counter-state

12
From Earthquake to 'Red Maquis', September 1954 to June 1956

The FLN insurrection of 1 November 1954 developed unevenly through space and time across Algeria. The epicentre was located to the east in the Aurès and Kabyles mountains, and the armed struggle finally reached the Chelif region as late as July 1956. This meant that the inhabitants of the Chelif lived through a period of eighteen months from late 1954 to the summer of 1956 during which there was a tense expectation of an approaching conflagration, but in which little happened, apart from some signs of early guerrilla forces beginning to infiltrate into the Dahra and Ouarsenis. The Chelif not only faced a long 'phoney war', but was dramatically diverted on the eve of the FLN revolt by one of the most devastating earthquakes of modern times on the night of 9–10 September. This, and the following two chapters, explore the way in which first the Communist Party, and then the FLN, set about organizing the first, embryonic guerrilla bases among the mountain peasants. While the communist guerrilla proved to be a very short-lived affair of a few months, it provides an insight into the particular difficulties faced by urban militants first attempting to make contact with the peasant population. The chapter starts with an examination of the ramifications of the earthquake since, in exposing the failure of the colonial government to organize a relief and reconstruction programme in the interior, it rapidly deepened peasant discontent and provided both the PCA and the PPA with the opportunity to extend their propaganda work in the *douars*. The rapid extension of militant relief organizations into the countryside not only supplied food, clothing, and materials, but also set up numerous peasant cells that used the opportunity of the crisis to establish clandestine networks that began to prepare for armed revolt.

The Earthquake Crisis and Peasant Resistance

At 1.11 am on the night of 9–10 September, seven weeks before the FLN launched its insurrection, Orleansville and its surrounding region was struck by an earthquake during which an estimated 1,147 people died, 1,980 were seriously wounded, and some fifty-four thousand houses or buildings collapsed so that

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

most of the population was forced to bivouac in the open or in tents just as the winter rains began to approach.[1]

For the French government the catastrophe immediately took on a key political function, a golden opportunity to demonstrate to international opinion that the colonial state, just as it was confronting the major rebellion in eastern Algeria, was a force for progress that through its massive rescue and reconstruction operations could demonstrate that colonialism and *Algérie française* was the best option for the Algerian people. The events in the Chelif drew enormous, global media attention and the highly mediatized relief operations provided the opportunity for Algiers and Paris to orchestrate propaganda that showed the humane face of colonialism, media images of the heroic rescue operations of French soldiers, medical teams, the Red Cross, firemen, and *colons* volunteers.[2] François Mitterrand, recently appointed Minister of the Interior, made two visits in quick succession to Orleansville, on 12 September and 19 October, official mediatized tours that were described by the young radical André Mandouze as Potemkin village 'masquerades'.

Far from rebuilding the devastated city in its previous form, the government seized the opportunity to plan a new and futuristic Orleansville, designed by leading architects, that was to stand as a showcase of colonial progress and would symbolize, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, the vision of a super-modern Algeria.[3] The Orleansville reconstruction led to the creation of the *Commissariat à la reconstruction et à l'habitat rurale* (CRHR), and served as a test-bed for the design of low-cost forms of housing that later spread throughout Algeria during the vast military resettlement (*regroupements*) process.[4]

However, far from reinforcing the colonial government, the scale of the disaster placed an extraordinary strain on the existing administrative services, and in doing so dramatically exposed the long-standing problems of 'under-administration' in the rural interior, and the extent to which, in spite of attempts

[1] The best-informed report on the earthquake is a CHEAM essay (ANP 20000046/115) by Mustapha Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement de terre d'Orléansville* (1956), a senior civil servant in the sub-prefecture who was in charge of keeping all the financial data and other statistics on the relief operation. For an excellent, recent study, see Spencer D.Segalla, *Empire and Catastrophe. Decolonization and Environmental Disaster in North Africa and Mediterranean France since 1954* (Nebraska: Nebraska University Press, 2020).

[2] Yael Simpson Fletcher, 'The Politics of Solidarity: Radical French and Algerian Journalists and the 1954 Orleansville Earthquake', ch. 6 in Patricia M. E. Lorcin (ed.), *Algeria and France 1800–2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 84–98.

[3] On the 'new' city project of Orleansville undertaken by a team of architects influenced by the modernism of Le Corbusier, see Mahmoud Mostefaoui, 'La reconstruction d'Orléansville (1954–1960). Contribution à l'histoire de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme du mouvement modern en Algérie', projet de thèse, University Paris 1, October 2015; Soraya Bertaud du Chazaud, 'Aujourd'hui à Chlef le centre Larbi Tebessi, hier à Orléansville le centre Albert-Camus (1955–1961)', *Livraisons de l'histoire de l'architecture* 30 (2015), 117–29; Zeynep Çelik, *Urban Forms*.

[4] See S. Henni, *Architecture*, 65, 162, 200–1. Jean de Maisonseul, director of the Orleansville programme, was later to be imprisoned during 1956 to 1958; see A. Camus, *Actuelles* 111, 185–96.

at reform, the mountainous interior had been largely abandoned to its own fate. Historians and sociologists have shown a growing interest in the way that so-called 'natural' catastrophes, due to floods, hurricanes, tsunami, earthquakes, volcanoes, and fires, in testing the ability of the state to respond quickly and effectively to crisis conditions, have rapidly revealed the long-term weakness of central and local government and brutally exposed class and ethnic inequalities that were normally concealed or latent.[5] In the Chelif region the extraordinary coincidence of the earthquake catastrophe and the insurrection that followed only weeks later to the east created a complex, layered effect in which the surge in nationalism was compounded by huge popular discontent with the failure of the relief programme. There were strong signs in the Chelif during 1952 to 1954 that popular radicalism was beginning to recover its force after the Naegelen repression, as shown by the bitter miners' strike of 1952, the police killing of supporters that had gathered during Messali Hadj's visit to Orleansville on 14 May 1952, and the massive demonstrations in Orleansville in August 1954 to show solidarity with the hundreds of Tunisian 'patriots', both men and women, that had been transferred to the town's prison.[6]

Both the Communist Party and MTLD built on this growing wave of unrest, a veritable insurrectionary climate, by seizing on the failings of the relief and reconstruction programme. They were quick to point out that the global recovery plan, headed by the *Commissariat* (CRHR) prioritized spending on showcase European projects in the towns, while the huge peasant populations in the mountains, already suffering from a lack of basic infrastructure, were living in tents or rough shelters since an estimated 39,037 fragile *gourbis* had collapsed.[7] There was a serious failure of local government to ensure the fair distribution of the few resources that were available, whether reconstruction grants and loans or material assistance in the form of tents, food, and clothing. This fact was even confirmed by Mustapha Benabdessadok, one of the key officials in charge of the relief work. Weeks after the quake only seven thousand tents had arrived, and some twenty-five thousand families were still living in the open, exposed to a heat wave, followed by rain and mud. Many tents, which were in short supply, were appropriated by the relatively affluent town-dwellers, leading to near-riot conditions in the distribution centres. Worse still was the situation in the mountainous interior where roads rendered impassable meant that little relief could get through. The distribution of tents, supplies, and money were made via the

[5] A prime example has been the critical sociology generated in response to the failure of the Bush administration to cope with Hurricane Katrina; see also Jürgen Buchenau and Lyman L. Johnson (eds), *Aftershocks: Earthquakes and Popular Politics in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009). They note, 'Introduction', 7, how in moments of extreme stress popular perceptions of government incompetence take on a new edge, and can lead to demands for regime change.

[6] *Liberté*, 5 and 12 August 1954.

[7] AOM 1K/703, administrator CM Chelif to sub-prefect, 9 December 1954; Governor General to prefect of Algiers, 15 July 1955.

traditional mechanism of the SIP, so that in effect the *caids*, *khodjas*, and field guards followed the habitual practice of giving priority to their own kin and clientèle.[8]

Even more shocking was the extent to which the *colons* and Algerian élite of Orleansville, which controlled significant budgets through the town hall and the local *Comité des sinistrés*, quarrelled among themselves as to how funds were to be distributed and finally resolved that forty million francs should go to the Europeans on the electoral list to the First college, about a fifth of the urban population, while the remaining fifty millions went to the great mass of Algerian poor. There existed an even greater imbalance in emergency relief between the urban centres and the peasants in the *douars* where Algerians outnumbered Europeans by twenty-eight to one.[9] The rural reconstruction programme '*Opération gourbis*' promised each household compensation of up to 20,000 francs, to ensure quick rehousing of earthquake victims. But corruption was rife and well-connected mayors in some municipalities had procured the rapid payment of 20,000 francs to all families in their CPE constituencies, even for buildings that had received minor damage, while in adjacent *douars* many were still without any compensation as late as 1956.[10] The relatively huge injections of reconstruction money and materials, provided an opportunity for rich pickings and an expansion of the kind of profiteering that was almost routine in 'normal' times.

Benabdessok's admission to the scale of the ethnic bias in favour of the Europeans who dominated the political system, a bias that was grounded in the dual, spatial political economy of the Chelif, did not prevent the administrator waxing lyrical over the opportunities now offered by the reconstruction programme. The villagization ideology that had been lying dormant among the planners and technicians since the departure of Lucien Paye in February 1948, resurfaced with a new force. The vast reconstruction programme seemed to offer an ideal opportunity to relaunch the modernizing programme of the *paysannat* on a grand scale. The *Délégation de la commission à la reconstruction* in charge of global planning established the SAH (*Service de l'amélioration de l'habitat*), a subgroup of housing specialists, that decided to use the opportunity to engage in a cleansing and eradication (*assainissement*) of the sordid *bidonvilles* of Bocca Sahnoun and La Ferme, hotbeds of militant nationalism, by the construction of modern housing estates (HLM). Likewise, in the rural zones, the initial phase of

[8] M. Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement*, 19.

[9] M. Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement*, 23–4; the urban-rural bias is confirmed by the statistics for reconstruction spending up to February 1956, listed in the appendix tables. Some 13,065 millions was spent in Orleansville, and 3,483 millions in the surrounding *douars*.

[10] AOM 4i206, typical of several letters of complaint is one in Arabic addressed to the prefect of Algiers in December 1955, over a year after the earthquake. Bedridine ben Laredj Chebine and Mahieddine ben Laredj Chehine of the *douar* Beni Chaib complained that three of their houses had collapsed, but the administration had not responded to any of their earlier petitions. Are we not, they asked, 'among the people of this Government! . . . Is Government not the same for all its people?'.

reconstruction of huts (*Opération gourbis*) using traditional building techniques was replaced from January 1955 by a drive, financed by 250 millions raised by an appeal in France, to construct modern housing units in concrete and by the regrouping of peasants into small hamlets.

The logic of villagization was, in part, driven by the difficulty of transporting building materials such as tiles and bricks into isolated *douars* in which there were no roads, so that new hamlets were relocated close to the plain. Regrouping of previously dispersed populations, as we have seen in the case of the 1946 PACs, was thought to facilitate an '*aménagement collectif*', and the future provision of schools, electrification, and other infrastructures.

As Mustapha Benabdessadok reported, the reconstruction involved more than a pragmatic agenda to improve living conditions, but included a political dimension and would have 'profound' psychological impacts. In a formulation of a classic tradition of bourgeois paternalism towards the deserving poor, the administrator argued that by encouraging peasants to rebuild their own homes they would achieve a new self-worth as property owners. He took issue with the SIPs that across Algeria handed out food, clothing, and money on a regular basis, a waste of what could be a lever to require peasants to earn any rebuilding grants through productive labour, rather than as a 'gift' that left them idle. It went unsaid that auto-construction would also be cheap and lower costs to the colonial budget. Furthermore, reconstruction was an act of solidarity through which colonial officials would persuade a suspicious rural population of their genuine humanitarian concern and by direct intervention in the *bled* reverse peasant perception 'that they were inevitably left to their own devices and could count only on God'. Benabdessadok tacitly admitted the failure, until then, of the colonial state to assist the peasantry, who suffered from a sense of radical abandonment by the authorities. But reconstruction officials and their advisers through making direct contact in the *douars* had their eyes opened, and 'this time things will not happen as in the past, as in the time of their ancestors who could die of famine or illness on the side of the road without the passer-by turning his head'.[11]

Finally, for Benabdessadok the reconstruction would have considerable counter-revolutionary impacts, since the peasants would recognize the sincerity of the French nation, and 'close their ears to the words of hatred and resentment' that were circulating so widely elsewhere in Algeria. In February 1956 when Benabdessadok wrote his report, Orleansville was still relatively untouched by the war that had been raging for nearly two years in the Aurès and Kabylie, and he still clung to the illusion that material improvement could act as a firewall against an FLN conflagration in the Chelif. The peasant, he wrote, 'was aware of the tempest that is raging in his country, but he thinks that his own region, hard hit by

[11] M. Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement*, 47–8.

natural catastrophes, remains like an oasis that is sheltered from the evil winds and where, after the storm, friendship continues to spread through the marvellous flowering of Franco-Muslim fraternity'.[12] Within four months Benabdessadok's illusion was to be rudely shattered.

The government viewed the reconstruction of Orleansville and its region as an important test-bed and model for the whole of Algeria and the French empire, a demonstration of how a developmental philosophy, the mass construction of modern houses and 'new villages', could reinforce the colonial grip on 'Third World' societies. As we will see later, the Chelif experiment, far from opening the path to a more humanitarian colonialism, fed directly into a vast military project for the radical dislocation of peasant society through the *regroupements* camps.

Benabdessadok was far too sanguine about the extent to which mountain peasants in the Chelif had been converted to a pro-French position. Tens of thousands in the isolated *douars* remained unaffected by reconstruction that was largely restricted to the urban centres in the plain, and many communities remained deeply suspicious of this, as of other, official interventions in their lives. Many saw the money or loans on offer as a poisoned gift: 'Many feared that they would, in the future, have to pay rent; others dreaded being grouped and thus subject to forms of surveillance that they were not used to.'[13] Above all the local government mishandling of the earthquake crisis demonstrated with startling force to a hard-pressed and often desperate peasantry that little, if anything, had changed in their position since 1944. The communists and PPA-MTLD immediately seized on the opportunity to co-ordinate a huge movement of opposition.

The Political Bureau of the PCA, meeting within days of the earthquake on 13 September 1954, attacked the failure of an administrative system that was geared up for repressive policing of the interior, but lacked the welfare and support structures to cope with such a crisis.[14] The PCA, along with the CGT, organized its own emergency relief that was distributed by lorry directly into the stricken zones of the interior, demonstrating to the peasants that, unlike the failing colonial state, the Party was able to see to their needs and to demonstrate class solidarity.[15] But most significant politically was the ability of the PCA to seize hold of the opportunity of the earthquake crisis to organize a new body, the *Fédération des sinistrés de la région du Chélif* (FSRC), which rapidly established a dense network of militant cells throughout the region.

[12] M. Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement*, 50.

[13] M. Benabdessadok, *Le tremblement*, 42.

[14] *Liberté*, 16 September 1954.

[15] The prefect of Algiers, to prevent the PCA and PPA from making political capital from the crisis, eventually decreed on 15 February 1956 that distribution of all relief had to pass via official state agencies: AOM 1K692, monthly report CM Chelif, 2 March 1956.

Abdelkader Babou, regional secretary of the PCA based in Blida, organized the Federation during a conference in Orleansville on 23 December 1954, attended by 192 delegates from local committees, that were welded into a classic communist 'front' organization. The Federation was governed by a thirty-seven-member Administrative Council and an executive bureau headed by the veteran trade union leader Mohamed Marouf and, under this umbrella, organized over a hundred peasant cells that extended outwards into the *douars* of Oued Fodda (three cells), Beni Boudouane (twenty-seven), Beni Rached (fourteen), Harchoun (ten), Tiberkanine (four), Beni Ouazane (five), Ouled Farès (twenty-two), Chouchaoua (nine), Tsighaouat (eleven), Bouaba (two), Medjadja (eighteen), and Orleansville (thirty-two). The FSRC co-ordinated an unprecedented wave of peasant demonstrations in the urban centres.[16] On 14 October, for example, seven hundred peasants representing eighteen *boccas* in the *douars* of Beni Rached, Tsighaout, and Medjadja, that were at the epicentre of the earthquake, gathered outside the sub-prefecture of Orleansville to demand tents, cash subsidies, seed-corn, and roof poles to rebuild their *gourbis*. They demanded action against officials that were profiting from the aid programme and claimed they would not allow, 'certain vile characters to wax rich from their poverty'.[17] On 25 November some five thousand peasants from ten *douars*, representing fifty-eight fractions, marched on the bureau of the Chelif CM in Orleansville to protest against the failure to carry out a survey or census of damage, to register victims for the first payment of 10,000 francs compensation, and the failure to deliver relief aid.[18] Novel forms of peasant mobilization extended to the creation of women's organizations. On 1 October 1954 women in the *douar* Ouled Larbi sent a delegation to the sub-prefecture of Orleansville that was headed by Odette Marouf, wife of the CGT leader, and Baya Allaouchiche, secretary of the communist *Union des femmes d'Algérie* (UFA).[19]

The Federation network shows how during late 1954 and 1955 the Communist Party had penetrated deep into the interior of the Dahra and Ouarsenis and the distribution of tons of food and clothing collected by the CGT and dock-workers of Algiers into the *douars* created a network of contacts that was soon to provide the basis for the formation of the first guerrilla bands.[20] Much of the material raised was cached for the future maquis.

[16] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, *note de renseignements*, 4 May 1956. This important document identifies by name and fraction or *bocca* nearly two hundred 'delegates' that represented the peasant cells. The list provides an indication of the extent of PCA penetration into the countryside and enables identification of many individuals who were soon to form the first maquis groups.

[17] *Liberté,* 21 October 1954. [18] *Liberté*, 2 December 1954.

[19] *Liberté*, 7 October 1954; on Baya Allaouchiche and the UFA, see my *Burning the Veil*, 32–7. On 4 November some seven hundred to eight hundred women marched on the town hall and sub-prefecture, and later held meetings with women in the shanty towns of Bocca Sahnoun and La Ferme.

[20] AOM 4i199, Miliana police RG report, 12 August 1955.

The Red Maquis, April–June 1956

On 20 June 1955 the central committee of the PCA decided to engage in armed struggle and began to form the paramilitary *Combattants de la libération* (CDL). During the following year, until the PCA negotiated the integration of its armed militants into the FLN, the communists began to form a number of maquis groups.[21] Since the 1930s the communists, largely through the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs*, had developed rural organizations in mountainous areas of the Aurès, the Blida Atlas, Tlemçen, the Ouarsenis, and the Dahra (Chapter 7), and all five zones gave rise to communist guerrilla activity during 1955–6; but the Algiers leadership selected the Chelif as the prime location for what became known as the 'Red Maquis'. After Algerian independence the communist movement commemorated the maquis as one of the highlights of its contribution to the struggle for independence, a dramatic event during which the army officer and communist militant Henri Maillot deserted, hijacked a lorry packed with 132 machine guns, and went into the Ouarsenis mountains with Maurice Laban, veteran of the Spanish Civil War, to fight a heroic last-stand battle with the army and the *harkis* of the *bachaga* Boualam.[22] The focus on the Red Maquis in the Beni Boudouane has tended to obscure the fact that other guerrilla units were formed in the Chelif region that have received little attention from historians. In the remaining part of this chapter I look first at the maquis group formed by Abdelhamid Boudiaf, north of the Chelif, before turning to the core location of the Red Maquis in the *douar* Beni Boudouane, in which the Maillot Laban group was quickly destroyed by the army. The following Chapter 13 then looks in close detail at the inner workings of a maquis headed by the veteran communist leader, Hadj Mohammed Zitoufi, in the Dahra mountains east of Ténès.

Abdelhamid Boudiaf and the Medjadja Maquis

There is little information about how the key leaders of the PCA secretariat in Algiers, among them Bachir Hadj-Ali, Sadek Hadjeres, Ahmed Akkache, and Jacques Salort, made the strategic choice of the Chelif region for its guerrilla operations, but we do know that all key liaison between Algiers and the Chelif operated through the figure of Abdelkader Babou, an ex-railway worker, member

[21] After long negotiations between the PCA and the FLN during May to June 1956 an agreement was reached under which, while the Communist Party refused to dissolve itself into the nationalist party, individual members engaged in the CDL would be integrated into the ALN; see text of the agreement in a letter from the PCA Central Committee to FLN, 12 July 1956, in H. Alleg et al. (eds), *La guerre d'Algérie*, 3.532–4.

[22] S. Kastell, *Le Maquis Rouge*, provides the standard account and was based on interviews with many of the key actors, most of whom are now deceased; see also J.-L. Einaudi, *Un algérien*, ch. 9, 'Le Maquis'.

of the Central Committee from 1948, and head of both the CGT *Union régionale des syndicats* in Blida, and regional secretary of the PCA, which included responsibility for the mid-Chelif.[23]

During 1955 and 1956 Babou, under the cover of trade union business, travelled frequently between Blida, Orleansville, and Ténès liaising with members of the CDL network, passing on central instructions, and co-ordinating activities. In Orleansville Babou's contact base was with the veteran militant Marcel Montagné, owner of a construction firm through which he was able to transport clandestine personnel and materials in his work vehicles. Montagné and Babou also liaised in Orleanville with the well-known architect Abderrahmane Bouchama who, from his office in the militant suburb of La Ferme, was involved in the massive post-earthquake reconstruction, a perfect cover for organizing clandestine networks that branched into the interior.[24] During the second half of 1955 Abdelhamid Boudiaf, who had extensive experience as an organizer in the rural areas of the Aurès-Sahara border, was sent by the PCA to join Montagné in Orleansville, where he received instructions from Babou on the creation of a revolutionary organization in the *douars* Medjadja and Beni Rached.[25]

As we have seen, the adjacent *douars* of Medjadja and Beni Rached, constituted the ancestral seat of the allied Saiah-Benbouali *grandes familles*, a *cheufa* clan that continued to enjoy *marabout* power through two shrines, and which dominated the political system and *caidat* in the Chelif region. The geographical location of the piedmont *douars*, within walking distance of Orleansville and the militant suburb of La Ferme, facilitated the communist and *Ulema* networks that bridged between urban and rural societies. During 1955 and 1956 Boudiaf was successful in preparing the ground for clandestine organizations in the two *douars* that would, once the moment was chosen, become a base for guerrilla operations.

What is unexpected about the Medjadja maquis is that Boudiaf was able to construct such a peasant network in precisely the zone that was the ancestral base of the powerful clan of the conservative Saiah. Although Abdelkader Saiah, as President of the Arab section of the *Délégations financières*, had led the nationalist resistance of the *Manifeste* movement during 1943–4 along with Ferhat Abbas, after the Sétif massacre he became a lynchpin in the repressive Naegelin system (Chapter 4). However, like other prominent members of the Algerian landed élite, he remained deeply ambiguous in relation to French colonial domination, a loss of

[23] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 77.

[24] On Abderrahmane Bouchama, who was close to the *Ulema*, and joined the PCA Central committee in 1949, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 148–9. Following the decimation of the '*Maquis Rouge*' he was interned at Berrouaghia.

[25] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 150–1; Boudiaf, from a peasant background, entered the Central Committee of the PCA in 1947. He was related to Mohammed Boudiaf, the FLN leader who was briefly President of Algeria before his assassination on 29 June 1992. On Abdelhamid's early location in Orleansville, see the memoirs of the surgeon Michel Martini, *Chronique*, on his concealment of Boudiaf in his hospital between 22 December 1955 and 4 January 1956.

confidence that left him vulnerable in the face of the final armed insurrection of 1954.

Abdelhamid Boudiaf, in post-Independence interviews, boasted of the way in which he had been able to carve out a support base in Medjadja and to challenge and splinter the patrimonial authority of the Saiah clan in their own backyard. Boudiaf recounted how he had managed to undermine the Saiah through a divide-and-rule strategy that played on the traditional rivalry (*çofs*) of the Bouthiba and Saiah clans: 'We placed pressure on Saiah himself, the old man. . . . we provoked him and eventually he realized that the whole *douar* was won to the Revolution. He knew we were the Communists-FLN. He was forced to place two of his farms at our disposal.' The Saiah, claimed Boudiaf, cried with rage when they suddenly recognized that 'the whole *douar* had escaped their control for ever', and that they had lost all their prestige with the rural population.[26]

However, Boudiaf's success was also made possible by the earlier politicization of the *douars* by the communists and nationalists, in part assisted by the unusually high levels of peasant literacy, and by the penetration of the *Ulema* movement that opened a section in Medjadja in 1952 under the presidency of Mohammed Ben Bahloul El Bouali, a farmer and head of a Koranic school, who supported the Boudiaf maquis.[27] But the terrain had also been prepared by the *Fédération des sinistrés*, which had succeeded during 1955 in creating cells in at least twenty-two of the total of thirty fractions in the *douars* of Medjadja and Beni Rached. By mid-1956 Boudiaf claimed to have formed combat units in all eighteen of the Medjadja *boccas*, nine of which were armed with shotguns and Maillot weapons.[28]

Several tactics were deployed by the communists, and later by the FLN, to weaken and demoralize the Saiah clan: a series of night-time raids targeted the Saiah farms and imposed heavy economic costs by cutting down stands of orange, olive, and eucalyptus trees, and setting fire to wheat fields, hay-ricks, tractors, and carts.[29] Senior family members could try and protect themselves by retreating into their urban houses, surrounded by armed guards, but PCA-FLN gunmen were sent to track them down. The timing of an assassination attempt in Algiers on 20 January 1956 against Tahar Benbouali Saiah, cousin and brother-in-law of Abdelkader Saiah, was not a mere coincidence, but served to warn the clan that the reach of the FLN was long, and that they were not safe anywhere.[30]

The elder Saiah were further weakened by the fact that their sons and daughters began to break away from the conservative, patrimonial *çofs* politics of their

[26] S. Kastell, *Le Maquis*, 112, 171–3.

[27] H. Alleg et al. (eds), *La guerre d'Algérie*, 2.113, interview with Abdelhamid Boudiaf. El Bouhali was later killed by the French army in an operation ('*ratissage*').

[28] S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 242, interview with Abdelhamid Boudiaf.

[29] Attacks on Saiah property occurred on 11 and 15 June 1955, 10 January, 3 April, 9 August, and 25 September 1956: AOM 1K692 CM reports; 1K874, and 81F879, gendarmerie reports.

[30] AOM 4i206, Algiers police to prefect of Algiers, 20 January 1956. A gunman wounded Tahar Saiah, a retired *bachaga*, with three shots as he got into his chauffeur-driven car.

fathers and uncles, to support the dynamic forces of nationalism that were offering a different vision of Algerian unity that cut across the vertical patron-client relations of family power. Robert Saiah, son of Abdelkader, later joined the FLN and headed a clandestine cell in Orleansville, as did Mohamed Bouthiba. Eventually several senior Saiah were forced to enter into negotiations with the PCA-FLN to hand over control of their farmhouses, and to make considerable payments. Boudiaf held a meeting with Saiah-Saiah of Beni Rached, who handed over seven millions, while the patriarch of the clan, Abdelkader Saiah, paid fifteen millions before departing for Switzerland.[31]

Boudiaf's careful preparation of a clandestine support base in Medjadja and Beni Rached was successful and when the main Maquis group led by Laban was forced to flee from encirclement by the French army in the Beni Boudouane across the Chelif River on 28 April 1956, they found a secure and comfortable base in the two *douars*. This is where the settlement pattern of dispersed farmhouses came into its own. The greatest danger to the infant Maquis came from informers, and in small communities that were immediately sensitive to the appearance of anybody that was an 'outsider' to their fraction it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, for guerrillas to hide their presence from women collecting water or kindling, goatherds, wood-cutters, and others. But the Boudiaf organization provided the maquisards with comfortable shelter and cooked food inside fortress-like *mechta* compounds that had no external windows, well-concealed inner courtyards, and were surrounded by a protective barrier of cactus and thorn.[32] When Boudiaf was eventually integrated into the ALN towards July 1956, the local commanders Bounaama, Si Baghdadi, and Ben Mahdjoub were impressed to discover the advanced level of organization in Medjadja and Beni Rached.

But the careful work of expanding the guerrilla base was dramatically ruptured by the almost inexplicable decision of Laban and Maillot to carry out an attack on the night of 2 June during which four men, suspected of acting as informers, were killed. A standard guide-line of both PCA and ALN, in particular during the early phase of maquis formation when new organizations were highly vulnerable, was to lie low and to avoid spectacular actions that could provoke a major police or

[31] S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 172. Further detail of payments is in AOM 91/1K 1186, intelligence report, 2e Bureau Algiers, 20 July 1957, interrogation of the money collector (*collecteur de fonds*) Sahraoui Bougharab ('Ouazani'), who claimed that three members of the Boutiba family (Mohamed, Kaddour, and Benaouda) had during late 1956 and early 1957 made four payments totalling three millions, while Saiah Saiah paid four millions and Mohamed Saiah one million, and Norbert, manager of the Saiah Bouali farm, four million, and another sixteen millions on behalf of 'la communauté Israelite d'Orleansville'.

[32] Among the *mechtas* that were occupied by the guerrilla were the farms of Djillali Bouzina, Abdelkader Zelmat, Saiah Saiah, and Saiah Henni ben Henni [or Douma]. The close blood-ties between inhabitants of neighbouring *mechtas* would also act as a protection since, even if 'strangers' were seen, members of the same clan or *bocca* would tend not inform on each other.

military intervention.[33] Despite this, a large guerrilla band of some seventeen men, including Laban and Maillot, travelled on the night of 2 June to the small hamlet of Beni Rached where they located Ahmed ben Hadj Zerrouki in his Arab café, along with three other suspected informers, and after executing them set fire to the bureau of the *caid*.[34] Quite predictably this provoked a massive police and army operation, and the Laban-Maillot group, after a forced march back south across the Chelif River into the *douar* Beni Boudaoune, from where they had escaped a month earlier, were quickly detected and destroyed.

The Red Maquis in the Beni Boudouane

The Beni Boudouane Red Maquis, the best known of the communist guerrilla locations, lasted a mere two months, from 4 April to 5 June 1956. My intention is not to look at every aspect of this controversial Maquis, one that is already quite well known through the work of Kastell, but to focus on the question of the relationship between the largely urban-based militants and the peasants of the Ouarsenis. In many ways this, the core of the Red Maquis venture, provided an object lesson in how not to organize a guerrilla base, a venture that appears to have been initiated by communist leaders in Algiers who had little understanding of the dynamics of rural society in the Ouarsenis, singularly failed to prepare a peasant base in advance, and dispatched urban militants who were ill prepared for the conditions which they faced in the mountains. The Red Maquis showed evidence of poor planning, an absence of political preparation of the mountain inhabitants, and a failure to appreciate the strength of the neo-tribal power of the *bachaga* Boualam.

Why the PCA chose to locate its main guerrilla force in the Beni Boudouane, rather than elsewhere in the Chelif region where conditions were more suitable, is unclear. The timing of the setting up of the base in a cave in the Ouarsenis during the first week of April was co-ordinated with the dramatic hijack by Henri Maillot of a consignment of army weapons, including 132 machine guns, 140 revolvers, and 57 rifles, on 4 April.

The Kabyle Abdelhamid Gherab, who was appointed military leader of the group, was first approached by Babou in January to hold himself ready.[35] Gherab,

[33] S. Kastell, *Le Maquis*, 167; Babou, Boudiaf, and Hamid Gherab, during discussions in Orleansville on about 7 April on future guerrilla strategy, agreed on the need to avoid actions that would, at an early stage, attract the attention of the authorities.

[34] It is not clear why the Maquis group engaged in such a seemingly foolhardy adventure, which led to the death of Laban, Maillot, and three Algerian militants. It is likely that a part in this error of judgement was played by the headstrong Laban who Mustapha Saadoun, a highly experienced peasant leader, saw as a destructive force in the group, a source of tension who, he claimed, 'had to make a big racket, fit to break everything'; S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 188.

[35] On Gherab, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 304–6.

a journalist with *Alger républicain*, had been recalled to the army and was undertaking training as a medical orderly in the military hospital of Ducros in Blida. On 8 April, four days after the weapons hijack by Maillot, Gherab was instructed to desert, and to go by train to Orleansville where, after several days in hiding, he went by bus to the Attafs and was met by a guide with a mule, Belkacem Hahnoun, who led him on foot deep into the Ouarsenis where a cave shelter had been prepared.[36] Four other leading figures joined the Maquis over the next few days, Mustapha Saadoun, the peasant militant from Cherchell, Mohamed Boualem, a CGT docker's leader from Oran, Maurice Laban (who arrived on 17 April), and Henri Maillot, who only reached the Medjadja maquis as late as 14 May.

The operation, planned by the Algiers leaders, was that the Maquis would receive arms from the Maillot consignment, but because the army and police imposed a huge search for Maillot and set up checkpoints on all the roads west from Algiers, they do not seem to have reached the Ouarsenis Maquis but were diverted into the Dahra in mid-May.[37] There has been much speculation as to why the central PCA leaders planned the arms heist and Red Maquis at this particular moment in time, but since the secretariat had entered into discussions with the FLN during May and June for a unification of the armed forces, it has been suggested that the PCA aimed to use the valuable weapons haul and the CDL Maquis in the Chelif as a bargaining chip.

Whether this was the case or not, the failure of the Laban-Maillot maquis can be attributed in part to the fact that the Algiers leaders, who had little, if any, experience of guerrilla operations, dispatched militants who had no knowledge of the Ouarsenis, of the terrain, or its population. Maurice Laban, who had been prevented by the PCA in 1954 from joining the Aurès maquis at the invitation of Ben Boulaid, in an area in which he had been born and raised, was peeved to find himself ordered in April 1956 into the Chelif. 'And now', he wrote in a letter, 'they are asking me to go to the Ouarsenis to form a maquis down there, a region that I do not know and where I will be going in blind'.[38]

[36] Serge Kastell, *Le Maquis Rouge*, was able to reconstruct the history of the Maquis through interviews with many of the survivors, including Gherab, Babou, Boudiaf, and Saadoun. Since Kastell's book a wealth of additional information has appeared, including the detailed autobiography of Michel Martini, *Chroniques*, who played a leading role in the clandestine support base of the Red Maquis, and the opening of major archive sources. Among the most important documents, AOM 1K874, provides a detailed, nine-page statement by Gherab, after his capture on 1 September 1956. Under severe torture Gherab provided detailed information on the Maquis, which led to the subsequent arrest and trial of Martini, his wife, and many other militants from Orleansville and Oran.

[37] On the complicated process of transfer of the arms into the Chelif, see S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 197–207. A large number of the Sten machine guns were defective or lacking a breech, and perhaps the delay was in part due to the need to get the guns repaired by an armourer before dispatch into the interior.

[38] Quoted in J.-L. Einaudi, *Un algérien*, 161.

Equally surprising was the apparent failure to have prepared the ground by organizing peasant support networks in the Ouarsenis. Contrary to the picture given by most commentators that the Beni Boudouane population was entirely loyal to France and the *bachaga* Boualam, a myth that Boualam himself helped to cultivate in his later memoirs, there is evidence that oppositional or nationalist movements had penetrated into the *douar* from at least 1946.[39] In 1946 the *caid* reported that a well-known notable, Mohammed ben Ahmed Djegheloul, who had been forced out from the *djemâa* of Beni Boudouane, had stirred up an oppositional movement with the support of three *boccas*.[40] Communist penetration into the *douar* was particularly strong under the aegis of the *Fédération des sinistrés*, which registered twenty-seven militants located in sixteen of the twenty-four *boccas*, indicative of an extensive penetration of the *douar*.[41] Already in late 1954 the security services were keeping a watch on the *douar* Beni Boudouane and on 26 December carried out a major operation ('*ratissage*').[42]

By October 1955 the police were receiving information that a maquis was being formed in the Ouarsenis, and the appearance of the first members of the Laban Red Maquis from 4 April onwards would certainly have been reported to the authorities that were already on a state of high alert. On 28–9 April a large-scale military operation surrounded and searched the *douar* and, although adverse weather conditions hampered the helicopters, eighteen peasants were rounded up by the 5th Regiment of the Foreign Legion and *gendarmes mobiles*.[43] The peasants, all men of the Beni Boudouane, were accused of harbouring and assisting the Maquis, and many of them were identified as communist members of the *Fédération des sinistrés* including Mohamed Mehbali of the *bocca* El Khesura, the head of the *douar*.[44]

Although this history of early communist penetration into the *douar* might suggest that the PCA leadership in Algiers acted in a rational way in selecting the Beni Boudouane as a base, they were dependent on the advice of Abdelkader Babou. But here Babou proved to be a weak link, and instead of building up in

[39] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 90–2, falsely claims 'his' people were entirely tranquil, showed no interest in politics, and 'on my turf there was not a single attack before 1956'.

[40] AOM 1Y113, PACs, report of the *caid*, 10 August 1946.

[41] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, *note de renseignement*, 3 May 1956.

[42] AOM 1K703, Algiers prefecture, *sécrétaire général* of police, 21 January 1955. After two men were arrested by the gendarmes, crowds gathered to demand their release.

[43] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 181–2.

[44] AOM 4i197, RG sub-prefecture Orleansville to RG Head of Algiers District, 30 April 1956, lists the eighteen men, at least six of whom can be found on the detailed list of *Federation* members. Some were found in illegal possession of firearms, and all were detained in the internment camp of Berrouaghia. AOM 9140/175 RG, Orleansville, 30 June 1956, identified Mehbali as head of the *douar*.

advance a strong support base among the peasants in the Beni Boudouane he sent outsiders, men from the *douar* Medjadja and Molière, to prepare a base.[45]

The peasants from Medjadja were as ill at ease as the European maquisards since they lacked any close knowledge of the terrain and, even more crucial, had no links to local families and social networks that would have provided a point of entry into the society. The comparative history of guerrilla movements shows that they were particularly vulnerable during the earliest stage of formation, the first days or weeks of implantation among mountain or forest populations, since this phase of initial contact would decide if they could rapidly achieve local support, or be denounced to the police and army. In the Dahra and Ouarsenis local communities reacted with deep suspicion or hostility towards the incursion of all outsiders, whether they be from neighbouring *douars* or agents of the state who, it was thought, could only have malign intentions, an interest in seizing resources, whether of taxes, conscripts, land, or mineral wealth.

The inhabitants of Beni Boudouane would have immediately identified, and probably reported to the headmen and *caid*, any suspicious 'strangers'. Isolated mountain communities had such distinctive variations in dialect and dress that they could readily identify the *douar* or fraction of origin of outsiders, as was the case on 5 June when Abdelkader Zelmatt was recognized by the harness of his transport mule as coming from Beni Rached. The failure of the Red Maquis to find a solid base in the population was shown by the fact that the Laban group, far from seeking contact with the people of the Beni Boudouane, spent much of their time trying to conceal themselves from the population in an isolated cave. The Maquis had just begun to make initial contact with a few locals, who helped provide food, when they were forced to flee north from encirclement by the army into Medjadja.

A further problem faced by the Maquis was a signal failure to build up a sufficient cache of food and materials in advance, and to establish a secure supply line and transmission between the cave and the urban centres. The group was thus constantly forced to send agents down into the nearest towns and markets to procure provisions, clothing, and specialized supplies like maps, paper, batteries, and medicines. The security services located, and destroyed, the Laban group on 5 June after they had intercepted Zelmatt, who had gone by mule to Lamartine to buy various goods and immediately aroused suspicion from a shop-keeper by an order that included wine. Shortly after Maillot joined the Medjadja maquis on 14 May, he was sighted by an informer in Orleansville where he bought sunglasses

[45] AOM 1K874, Gherab statement. Five men from Medjadja, Nah, Sadek, Abd El Kader, Si Abdallah, and Henni Doum Ben Henni, and Kouider from Molière arrived in the Ouarsenis on about 4 April, the date of the Maillot hijack, to establish a base in a cave. Myriam Benhaim, better known in later years as the writer and painter Myriam Ben, a school teacher in Oued Fodda, acted as the liaison driver between Algiers and the Chelif, working with a young communist militant, Belkacem Hannoun, also of Oued Fodda, who was killed by the army on 5 June; see Christiane Achour, *Myriam Ben* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989).

and tried to acquire ordnance maps of the region.[46] Finally, while waiting for some six weeks for the Maillot guns to arrive, the group of thirteen was equipped with only two weapons, a Spanish automatic and a German machine-gun pistol, each of a different calibre.

In general the Laban Maquis was badly prepared, and also revealed a degree of careless or amateurish behaviour, by contrast to the extensive support networks established by Boudiaf in Medjadja, to which it was eventually forced to flee from the French army encirclement of 28–9 April.[47] This makes it all the more surprising that Laban and Maillot decided to move back southwards across the Chelif River into the Beni Boudouane on 4 June, where they were rapidly located and killed.[48]

Three key leaders of the Maquis managed to escape from the army encirclement. Abdelhamid Gherab and Mohamed Boualem managed to travel towards Lamartine and were eventually picked up by one of Montagné's lorries and smuggled back into Orleansville disguised as building workers. In the town they were concealed by a team of hospital workers, headed by Michel Martini, and later driven by them into Oranie.[49] The Algiers government showed its determination, particularly after the humiliation of the arms hijack by Maillot, in tracking down and dismantling the communist network, and this led to the eventual identification and internment of some forty militants, including Gherab, Boualem, and the veteran Marouf and his wife Odette. But while the Red Maquis would appear to have come to a brutal end, and marked a radical failure, this would be to overlook the extent to which several key actors in the Chelif, in particular Saadoun, Boudiaf, and Babou, were rapidly integrated into the FLN and brought with them special skills and knowledge of the extensive networks that the PCA had built north of the Chelif River in the Dahra mountains.

Mustapah Saadoun, after escaping from the Laban encirclement, travelled on foot across country and found safety in the farmhouse of the Smail family in

[46] AOM 9140/175, RG report, Orleansville, 30 June 1956.

[47] M. Martini, *Chroniques*, 96–100, provides a devastating critique of the failure of the Maquis preparation that he ascribes not to the PCA Central committee, but to Babou. Among the many failings was 'the total absence of a political preparation of the peasant mass; the creation of a Maquis made up of townspeople from every corner of Algeria, except the Chelif. . . . the absence of all logistic preparation and food depots; the absence of even an elementary knowledge of guerrilla techniques . . .'. The failure to plan a fall-back position meant that after Gherab and Boualem had escaped to Orleansville they were left without support, and Babou, who refused to answer Martini's call for assistance, left the doctor the difficult and dangerous task of concealing and evacuating the two men.

[48] Laban and Maillot were buried at Lamartine, alongside three of the Algerian maquisards, Belkacem Hannoun, Abdelkader Zelmatt, and Djillali Moussaoui, the last two from Beni Rached that had been involved in the assassinations of 2 June.

[49] The police were soon to investigate and arrest Michel Martini and his wife Gilberte Bory, as well as numerous hospital staff that the surgeon had recruited in France. The group was involved with Maquis preparation from late 1955, delivering packages, providing medical supplies, harbouring cadres, and carrying out surgery on wounded men; M. Martini, *Chroniques*, 69–72, 114–16; AOM 12CAB155, intelligence reports from sub-prefect of Orleansville to prefect of Algiers, 5 June to 29 August 1956.

El Aneb, near Duperré, where he was integrated into the ALN and transferred into the Cherchell region.[50] Saadoun had from 1947 carried out a detailed geo-political survey of the north-east Dahra mountains, using maps and technical data passed to him by contacts in the local administration, so as to establish a detailed plan on how best to build up communist organizations in the mountain *douars*. Saadoun had an extensive, first-hand knowledge of the peasant communities west of Cherchell and in the Chenoua and had planned the PCA campaigns for the *djemâa* elections. He was able to bring his expert geo-political knowledge to the early stages of the ALN guerrilla formation in 1956 and, in particular, in the creation of the HQ at Adouiya in the *douar* Beni Bou Mileuk.[51] Likewise Abdelhamid Boudiaf, working in close liaison with the ALN leaders Bounaama, Ben Mahdjoub, and Si Baghdadi, continued to build on the PCA networks he had established in the *douars* of Medjadja and Beni Rached.[52]

Historians have, in general, presented the July agreement by the PCA to dissolve the CDL into the FLN as one in which the communists were finally marginalized and dominated by the nationalists, but the picture was less clear-cut in the Chelif. Firstly, the ALN maquis in the Chelif region in mid-1956 was still in a weak and fragile state and, in particular, faced a dangerous and difficult task in trying to eliminate the MNA that was embedded in Orleansville. In this emerging civil war, the ALN was more than happy to be able to integrate, and to build upon, the extensive PCA networks and to receive a large share of the Maillot stock of weapons. Moreover, close contact and working relations had developed between the PCA and FLN locally in advance of the national agreement, so that militants did not wait for a green light from Algiers to collaborate, but had entered much earlier into a flexible, decentralized coalition of forces. This unity was reflected in police intelligence reports that, finding it difficult to identify members of the guerrilla underground by party affiliation, labelled them the 'PCA-FLN'.[53]

In conclusion, the Red Maquis throws light on two elements of guerrilla construction. Firstly, as a consequence of the location and killing of the communists Laban and Maillot, the two bête noir of the *colons* press, the *bachaga* Boualam received huge national and international media coverage, and became the emblem for the *Algérie française* movement and the conservative press of the pro-French tribal warlord who, with his loyal *harkis* units recruited from the peasants of the Beni Boudouane, represented a powerful force that could take on and defeat the ALN in the mountains. Although Boualam's support base in the Ouarsenis was weaker than he claimed, his story illustrates the problems that strong patrimonial and patron-client alliances continued to pose for the FLN. While the PCA was

[50] S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 225–6.
[51] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 41–4, 50–6.
[52] S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 241–2.
[53] However, in time, both Saadoun and Boudiaf became the victim of anti-communist pressures inside the FLN. The *wilaya* 4 commander, Colonel Si Mohammed, sought to protect Boudiaf by evacuating him to Morocco in 1958, from where he passed to the USSR.

successful in undermining and finally cracking the patrimonial power-base of the Saiah in the Dahra, in the case of Boualam the communists, and subsequently the ALN, failed to dislodge the neo-tribal *caid* who was able to retain or to manipulate the allegiance of an isolated peasantry bound by traditional patriarchal and religious values.[54]

Finally, the Red Maquis events, both in the Beni Boudouane and Medjadja and Beni Rached, show to what extent the central problem confronting the embryo guerrilla was how to protect itself from informers. Stathis Kalyvas, in his comparative study of violence in civil war, has argued convincingly that informing is central to such types of conflict and that the key dynamic is the choice that civilian informants make in providing information to the occupying or incumbent forces.[55] In a situation in which the embryo communist guerrilla was fragile and surrounded by powerful enemies, the greatest danger in the mountains came from the hundreds of eyes that inevitably picked up on their every move. A prime purpose of the communist and subsequent ALN assassinations, was to produce fear, or more literally coercive 'terror', an exemplary violence that was aimed to deter the peasantry from collaborating with the authorities.[56] The next chapter investigates these issues, the tensions internal to the peasant community, through a close investigation of the Zitoufi Maquis, the third zone of communist guerrilla activity in the Chelif region.

[54] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 114–16, 122–4, recounts the pressures placed on him by the FLN, a carrot and stick approach that included offers of many millions of francs in exchange for a free passage of ALN guerrilla units through the Beni Boudouane, and the assassination of his brother, a son, three brothers-in-law, and about thirty other relatives.

[55] Stathis N. Kalyvas, The *Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 14, 'denunciation constitutes a key microfoundation of intimate violence and, hence, of civil war'.

[56] In addition to the four suspect informers assassinated on 2 June 1956, Boudiaf later carried out the execution of Bouzina of Medjadja, a key liaison agent for the Maquis, accused of passing information to the sub-prefect of Orleansville: S. Kastell, *Le Maquis*, 241–3.

13
The Zitoufi Maquis

While the ill-fated Red Maquis of Laban and Maillot attracted enormous attention from the contemporary media, as it has from later historians, another communist guerrilla movement further north in the coastal mountains east of Ténès, has gone unnoticed. This foci of activity, which I will call the 'Zitoufi maquis', found a base in the *douar* of Taourira where the veteran peasant leader had held power as president of the *djemâa* since 1919 (see Map 6).

This small, short-lived maquis is of particular interest because of a document, a detailed report of an investigation by the local gendarmes of Francis Garnier, that provides a rare insight into the micro-processes of maquis formation and how tensions divided the everyday, face-to-face relations of a traditional rural community.[1]

Hadj Mohamed ben Bénaissa Zitoufi, the patriarch of the extended Zitoufi family, father of fifteen children, was born in the fraction Souahlias in the *douar* Taourira in 1888.[2] Hadj Zitoufi was a communist militant of some importance, had been elected in March 1945 as national president of the *Syndicat des petits cultivateurs* (SPC), and had nurtured the young miner's trade union leader Abdallah Mokarnia in his successful bid to win the presidency of the adjacent *djemâa* of Beni Haoua in 1947 (Chapter 9).

Hadj Zitoufi lived with his three sons, Brahim (aged 29) who was married with six children, Ali Ben Hadj (aged 24), married with one child, and Hocine (aged 22), married but without children, in a large *mechta*. This was a classic joint *ayla* group of at least fourteen individuals, living under the authority of the 68-year-old patriarch, who daily summoned his sons to the tasks of collective work. Despite the fact that all four men were illiterate, with the exception of Brahim who was literate in Arabic, these small farmers were relatively well-off, and since their land was not far from the coastal road, they were able to maintain a car, and bring in

[1] The thirty-nine-page typed document, AOM 1K874, is the legal *procès-verbal* of the Gendarmerie Brigade of Francis Garnier, 28 July to 9 August 1956, relating to the investigation of the maquis, the arrest and interrogation of eleven men, and witness statements of thirteen men and a woman, all inhabitants of the *douar* Taourira. Gendarmerie investigations, unlike those of the military, were subject to the legal requirements of the *police judiciaire*, and thus provide a wealth of detail for the social historian that is absent from military counter-insurgency operations.

[2] Zitoufi is reported to have had four wives: between 1891 and 1948 the percentage of married males in a polygamous relationship fell from 15.3 per cent to 3 per cent, and was increasingly restricted to a small number of better-off, traditionalist peasants; see Kamel Kateb, *Européens, 'Indigènes'*, 141, 252.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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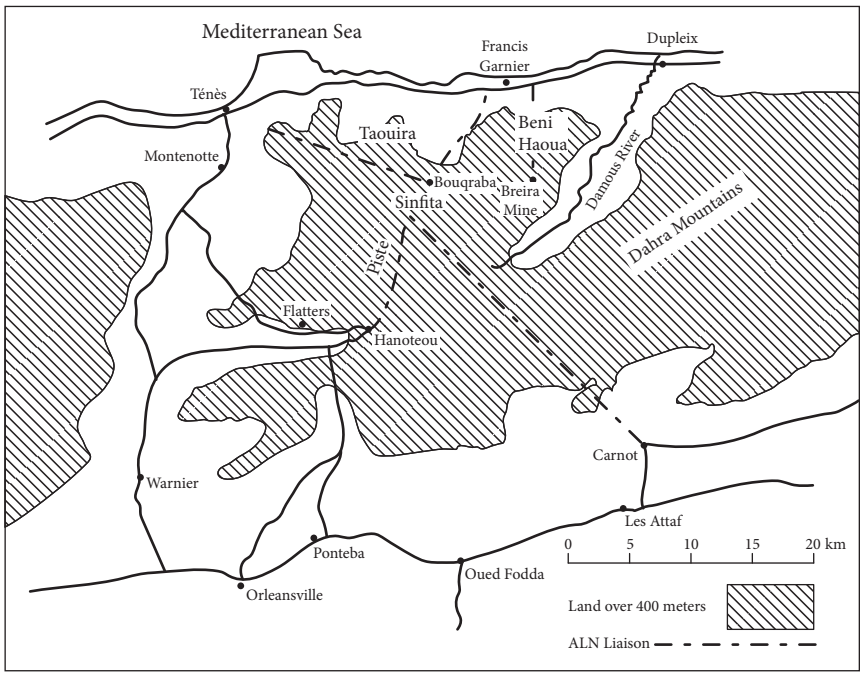

Map 6 Zone of *Pilote* 1 operations in the Dahra Mountains. Mapping by Peter Gibbs.

extra income from an Arab café. There is little background information on these hill farmers, but they were certainly communist militants, and a note of the intelligence services indicates that Ali Ben Hadj had been condemned in 1952 to five years in prison by a military tribunal in Tunis for possession of illegal weapons. We have no further information on this unexpected link to Tunisia which suggests that the Zitoufi family had an early, transnational connection to the armed revolt that had begun in 1952 and possibly to gun-running. The Zitoufi clan, which included the separate household of three nephews, was rich in men and a force to be reckoned with in the *douar*.[3] This was a typical well-to-do 'middle peasant' family of the kind analysed by Eric Wolf, an intermediary class that held 'tactical power' that enabled them to become a conduit for anti-colonial radicalization of the rural population.

The mobilization of the Zitoufi family and recruitment into a maquis came about through instructions of the PCA received from Abdelkader Babou, head of the communist region of Blida, and three militants of Ténès, the general practioner Dr Jean Masseboeuf, the headteacher Gaston Donnat, and the Kabyle Rabah Benhamou, who kept a food stall in the town market. Masseboeuf had

[3] The three nephews of Hadj Zitoufi were Mohamed ben Ali (29 years), Ali ben Ali (23), and Abdelkader ben Ali (21), also known as 'Hocine'.

set up practice in Ténès in 1935, and twenty years later was one of the leading notables of the town, a colourful character who was well known to both *colons* and Algerians throughout the area for his remarkable work as a general practitioner and his strong anti-Vichy stand that led to his internment in a Saharan camp at Ouargla during 1941–2 for 'anti-national subversive activities'.[4]

A second leading militant working alongside Masseboeuf was Gaston Donnat who arrived with his family in late September 1954 in his new post as director of the secondary school in Vieux Ténès.[5] In his memoirs Donnat recounts how during the course of 1955 he became increasingly aware of a pre-insurrectionary climate building up, and of the fact that local Algerian militants were becoming frustrated at the failure of the PCA to join the armed revolt.[6] This was a message that Donnat received through his close contact with Abdallah Mokarnia, the young miner's trade union leader from Beni Haoua, and Rabah Benhamou, secretary of the Ténès communist branch.

Benhamou, who was to play a key role in the formation of the Zitoufi maquis during early 1956, was a Kabyle born towards 1914 in the *douar* Baloua near Tizi Ouzou, and by coincidence had, at the age of 12, been employed as an aid in the household of Donnat's father-in-law, Caracéna.[7] Caracéna, son of a Catalan anarchist, was famous in communist circles for his leather workshop in Tizi Ouzou that served as a permanent forum for militants and in which the

[4] On Masseboeuf, see R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 463–4, M. Martini, *Chroniques*, 55–6, 73–4, 80–4; the special issue of *Le Journal de la Médecine du Travail* 18 (Annaba), dedicated to him, online at <www.daroum.e-monsite.com/medias/files/jmt18.pdf>, accessed on 16 November 2016; Mohamed El-Ouahed, article in *Mémoria, la Revue de la mémoire d'Algérie*, 24 (2014), 91–100. Born in La Rochelle, 14 December 1908, Masseboeuf arrived in Algiers in 1921 and studied medicine at Algiers University (1928–33). He joined the Communist Party in March 1943, and after his arrest on 7 July 1956 was sentenced to twenty years hard labour. Liberated on 13 April 1962, he chose Algerian nationality, and had a distinguished career in occupational health. After a late conversion to Islam he died in Constantine 24 April 1985. His career path was remarkably similar to that of the Orleansville surgeon Martini: both experienced prison as a 'liberating' experience through close friendship with Algerians from every walk of life, and after 1962 opted to stay in the new-found Republic and played a major role in post-Independence medicine.

[5] Gaston Donnat's autobiography, *Afin que nul n'oublie*, is an important source for the organization of the communist maquis. Gaston Donnat arrived in Algeria in 1931 at the age of 18, studied at the École Normale of Bouzaréah (1933–5), and after emigrating to French Cameroon in 1944, played a major role in the political formation of a generation of future nationalist leaders, among them Ruben Um Nyobé, through the creation of the *Cercles d'études marxistes*. Donnat founded the first central trade union, the *Union des syndics confédérés du Cameroun* (USCC) that was led by Nyobé; see Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue, and Jacob Tatsitsa, *Kamerun! Une guerre cachée aux origines de la Françafrique 1948–1971* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), 40–2, 64, 76–9. Donnat thus brought into the Chelif considerable experience as an anti-colonial militant and organizer.

[6] G. Donnat, *Afin que nul n'oublie*, 322–5; during July and August 1955 Donnat organized a children's holiday camp in the mountains near Tlemçen where he worked closely with the peasant leader Tahar Ghomri, and learned from him the growing certainty of an imminent communist insurrection.

[7] On Benhamou, see AOM 1K874, *gendarmerie procès-verbal*, 28 July 1956, identification of 'Ali Benhamou'; G. Donnat, *Afin*, 300; R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 113–14. *Liberté*, 24 January 1952, reported that Benhamou had appeared in court for distributing a leaflet in solidarity with the people of Morocco and which denounced, 'the colonialist provocations of General Juin'.

young Rabah received a political education.[8] Benhamou was well known to militant peasants from Beni Haoua and Taourira who visited his food stall on market days, and that served as a point of contact for clandestine activities. Abdelkader Babou and Dr Masseboeuf, in preparing to insert a maquis into the mountains east of Ténès, placed the tough Benhamou in charge of guerrilla operations.

By February 1956 Benhamou, while still living in Ténès, was liaising with militants in the region of Francis Garnier, sending orders and equipment to men who, not yet part of a permanent guerrilla base, went out from their homes at night to carry out acts of sabotage. Djilali Hannou and Mohamed Guerba, supplied by Benhamou with saws, cut down nine telephone poles on the night of 2–3 February, while Hannou, supplied with two artisanal bombs tried to blow up the RN 11 coastal road on 10 February.[9] On 2 April Ahmed Ben Mohammed Samet, head of the communist cell in Francis Garnier, travelled by bus with Hannou, and three other militants, to Ténès to meet Benhamou to receive instructions on sabotage operations and paramilitary training. The police, tipped off by an informer, arrested the group in Ténès, although Benhamou managed to escape from his police cell on 3 April, almost certainly through the assistance of Dr Masseboeuf, who had sent his employee Balia to the police station ten minutes before the evasion.[10] From that moment Rabah Benhamou travelled east to the *douar* of Taourira where he found refuge with the veteran peasant leader Hadj Zitoufi and his sons and nephews, and began to prepare a guerrilla base.[11]

When Rabah Benhamou first arrived at Taourira in April 1956 he came to the Arab café that the Zitoufi family ran at the hamlet of Oued Goussine on the coastal road, and announced rather grandly to the sons that he was a 'chosen of God' sent from Ténès to make contact with their father. The elderly Hadj, who may have found the Kabyle abrasive, did not want to accommodate him in his own *mechta*, but was prepared to pay a contribution of 90,000 francs for the new guerrilla leader to be housed and fed by his nephew, Mohamed ben Ali Zitoufi, who lived close by. From this base the authoritarian Benhamou, working mainly through Zitoufi's three sons and three nephews, set about the task of building up and training a guerrilla band of about fifteen men, and established shelters in various caves, with reserves of food and equipment. But before looking at this more closely, we need to have an understanding of the political and social position of the patriarch Hadj Zitoufi, and of his extended family, within the *douar* since

[8] R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 187–8; Albert Camus stayed with the family during 1936.

[9] AOM 4i209, RG Orleansville, 9 April 1956.

[10] AOM 4i209, RG Orleansville, 9 April 1956. Benhamou later sought to assassinate the informer, identified as Aissa Attaf, who had defected from the communists, but by then he had already fled the area with his family and belongings.

[11] Benhamou's mission that began in April 1956 coincided with the creation of the Laban maquis in the Beni Boudouane, and was clearly part of a wider PCA plan to co-ordinate the implantation of several groups in the Chelif region, all of which were to receive the Maillot arms.

on that would depend their ability to organize a secure support base in the population.

Like other local political leaders from the middle peasantry, Hadj Zitoufi, reflected a highly ambiguous position, shared by many *caids* and *djemâa* presidents, as a domineering figure who could behave towards local people in an authoritarian manner, while simultaneously claiming to act as their protector against an oppressive colonial administration. The notable was engaged in a difficult balancing act, between extracting as many concessions as possible from administrators for 'his' people, while compensating himself with a fair 'reward' for his services from his clients without tipping over into the abuses described as '*faire sueur le burnous*'. Such localized hierarchical or clientele power relations, in which Hadj Zitoufi shared, would appear to be completely at odds with the class ideology of communism.

The gendarme investigation of 1956 revealed that Hadj Zitoufi had since the end of the First World War carved out for himself a significant political base in the *douar* Taourira through a combination of working closely with the colonial establishment in the region, and exerting an authoritarian hold over the peasantry, one that did not exclude a degree of exploitation of the poor and vulnerable.[12] A number of the peasants interrogated by the gendarmes presented a consistent picture of Hadj Mohammed as a man who struck fear into the local population.[13] A labourer with the *Ponts et chaussées* remarked: 'In the *douar* his orders are faithfully carried out by the inhabitants as if they were his slaves, since everyone knows what it will cost to disobey him. He uses every method to enslave the population and seizes the property of all those who are reluctant to follow him.'[14]

A widow, Fatma Assouni, recounted how six armed men, including one of Zitoufi's sons, who claimed to be soldiers of the National Liberation Army, had come to her house on 27 June 1956 to demand money, which she had refused point blank. Fatma had not informed the authorities at the time because, she told the gendarmes, the band could only have been operating under the orders of Hadj Mohammed, whom she greatly feared. 'Zitoufi Hadj would have taken me to court for one motive or another, as he has done often. No doubt he would have claimed that my goats had destroyed his crop. That would be very much in line with his style of conduct.' Several years earlier Fatma, like many women living in isolated rural areas, had found it difficult to collect her pension as a war widow and Zitoufi, in arranging collection on her behalf had, she claimed, pocketed half the money.

[12] AOM 1K874, sub-prefect of Orleansville to the Resident Minister, Lacoste, 23 August 1956, described Zitoufi as 'a personality who has acquired much authority over the population since he has been constantly re-elected since 1919'.

[13] AOM 1K874, statement of Djelloul ben Ali Allaoui, farmer aged 61: 'Zitoufi Hadj Mohammed is very influential in the *douar* and the inhabitants live in fear since they know that he supports the rebels.'

[14] AOM 1K874, statement of Mohamed ben Ali Ramdani.

After making a complaint to the administrator of the *commune mixte* it was arranged for her to receive the pension directly. Since then Hadj Mohammed bore a grudge against Fatma and, she claimed, if the Zitoufi had come to extort money from her on 27 June, it was because they knew that she had received her pension two days earlier.[15]

We have to treat such statements made to the gendarmes with caution: some, like Fatma, may have been seizing on the opportunity of a police interview to gain revenge on the Zitoufi family. But even allowing for distortion, the gendarme investigation provides a fascinating insight into the everyday tensions that were characteristic of peasant communities, in which inhabitants had intimate knowledge of the affairs of neighbours, and in which quotidian tensions could, under the conditions of civil war, translate into informing that could carry dangerous consequences. If Hadj Mohammed was feared and hated by some inhabitants of the *douar*, there were undoubtedly others, especially those among his clan and clientele, that supported him. As the respected head of the *djemâa*, Hadj Zitoufi was called upon to adjudicate and resolve local disputes, thus helping peasants to avoid the heavy cost of resorting to French lawyers and courts.[16] But others experienced Zitoufi's all-seeing presence as an oppressive micro-police state, as did the 63-year-old farmer Hadj Boualem ben Yahia: 'He keeps tight authority over the inhabitants of the *douar*. He knows exactly what is going on in each family and in the *douar* because he has an important network of devoted sneaks and spies.'

Zitoufi occupied a paradoxical position as somebody who cannily manipulated the local authorities while simultaneously opposing the colonial system. This Janus-face quality of political leaders in the *douars* could be found throughout rural Algeria and, as we have seen, many *caids* and *djemâa* presidents sought to extend protection (*açabaya*) to the peasants in their jurisdiction by shielding them, as far as possible, from state demands for taxes, conscripts, *corvée* labour, and land sequestration. After 1919 the elected *douar-djemâas* became the standard source of oppositional power in relation to both the administration and those *caids* that offered themselves as loyal agents of the state. This was exactly the role fulfilled by Hadj Zitoufi who, as president of the *douar* of Taourira, cultivated among the inhabitants an image of himself as the opponent of the *caid*, the subservient representative of colonial authority. As the peasant Mohamed ben Ali Ramdani told the gendarmes: 'When Zitoufi sees the *caid* or the field guard

[15] It seems likely that the guerrillas, in deciding which households to target in their night-raids, had prior information about the date of arrival of regular pension and remittance payments. Benhamou, for example, led his group to the house of Ali ben Amar Assouni and demanded 40,000 francs, knowing that he had received a payment from France.

[16] AOM 1K874, interrogation of Hadj Mohammed Zitoufi: 'the population of the *douar* always have recourse to me to resolve the problems that arise between the inhabitants (arguments, brawls, etc.). Through them I know about all the things that are going on.'

come into his Arab café, if he tells his clients not to greet them nobody will say good day.' Zitoufi encouraged the young communist militant Mokarnia in his opposition to his brother-in-law, the *caid*, by winning the Beni Haoua election of 1947, and in 1956 Benhamou informed the guerrilla: 'The *caid* of Beni Haoua will be killed because he is opposed to us.'[17]

But while assuming an anti-French position, Zitoufi also seemed to enjoy an occult influence with the administration that provided him with protection, even after his links to the maquis had become known.[18] Mohamed ben Ali Ramdani told the gendarmes that Zitoufi, 'enjoys an incomprehensible influence with the French administration. In effect he is always in contact with the gendarmes, the administrator [of the CM], the sub-prefect. He often goes, he says, to see the prefect and high placed politicians and gets all that he wants.' There seemed to be some substance to the peasant's fear of Zitoufi as a man who had mysterious connections to the French authorities. General de Brebisson, commander of the Orleansville zone, was angered that the sub-prefect had refused to accept Zitoufi's arrest in August 1956, even when the evidence against him was conclusive, because of his political influence in the region, and again when the sub-prefect intervened to procure the release from prison of Zitoufi and his sons.[19] Zitoufi's apparently 'protected', and some would say 'collaborationist' position, with the colonial administration derived from his strategy, one shared by many *caids* and *djemâa* presidents, of fighting for as many economic concessions as possible from the local authorities, from provision of schools and medical care, to food relief and job creation for the unemployed.[20] This, inevitably, involved some degree of negotiation and contact with the administration and, indeed, the stronger the leverage of notables like Zitoufi with the *commune mixte* and sub-prefect, the greater their ability to attract funding and to reinforce their own popular political base.[21]

The communist and FLN maquisards were, in general, recruited from relatively young and fit men since the life of the guerrilla was physically extremely demanding, especially during the almost constant long-distance marches to escape

[17] AOM 1K874, interrogation of Hocine ben Hadj Zitoufi. The animosity had endured for at least a decade ; see AOM 4i209, RG Orleansville to RG Algiers, 5 July 1946: '*Caid* Mokrane Hocine of the *douar* Beni Haoua is a weak and easily influenced man, without prestige, and is placed under a constant pressure by the president of the *douar-djemâa*, Zitoufi, secretary of the local section of the CGT, in favour of the AML.'

[18] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 120, describes Zitoufi as 'a client of the French administration . . . who benefited from secret protection'.

[19] AOM 1K874. General de Brebisson to General in Command of the Algiers Military Division, 16 August 1956. The sub-prefect defended his actions in a letter to the Resident Minister Lacoste on 23 August 1956, one of caution since Zitoufi exercised such authority over the population.

[20] Zitoufi, for example, drove to Ténès to discuss the issue of relief programmes following the earthquake of September 1954.

[21] AOM 1K 874, statement of Mohammed ben Ali Ramdani, labourer: 'the *douar* is, in reality, governed by Zitoufi who is adroit enough to let people think that only he is capable of maintaining peace. On the other hand, he is always critical of France.'

pursuing French forces.[22] The Liberation movement saw a division of labour between the younger combatants and the older generation that, while unable to go into the mountains, carried an equally important supportive role through carrying on with their normal function as *commerçants*, pharmacists, police officers, town councillors, and civil servants. In keeping with this the 68-year-old Hadj Zitoufi took no part in the physically demanding guerrilla operations, actions delegated to his sons and nephews, but assisted the maquis through his functions as head of the *djemâa*, raising funds, and through his ownership of a car, with which he was able to liaise with the PCA in Ténès and transport materials into the *bled*. But his most important political role was as patrimonial leader, to rally the entire *douar* in support of the maquis.

Every year Zitoufi asserted his position as moral leader of the community by making a speech during religious festivities when inhabitants from across the *douar* gathered at the *marabout* sanctuary of Sidi Abderrahmane. The mountain population here, as in the Ouarsenis, inhabited dispersed farmhouses, and religious ceremonials and pilgrimages offered one of the rare occasions during which the population of men, women and children was gathered together.[23] On the festival to mark Aid-el-Kébir on 19 July 1956, Zitoufi had spoken at length about the recent arrival of guerrillas in the *douar*, and had expected that every single person in the community would uphold the collective *omerta* that was the classic peasant defense against the French: 'These men [guerrilla outsiders] are in the *douar* and things are going to start. But watch out those who talk about this; they will be killed and their property burned down. Take close attention: when you see something or if one of you loses something, come and let me know and nobody else.'[24] As elsewhere during the war, the *douar* and fraction leaders attempted to maintain the essential unity of the community as a mechanism of defense against external threats.

Between April and August 1956 the newly formed maquis, under the leadership of Rabah Benhamou, centred its activities in three key areas that are considered in turn, the location and construction of caches and cave shelters, the collection of

[22] AOM 9140/5, report of police commissar of Ténès to Colonel Rieutord, 30 October 1957, identified forty-five men of Ténès in the maquis at 30 October 1957, with an average age of 24.6 years. All of them were aged under 34 years except for the two leaders Larbi Elassenouni (40 years) and Benhamou (43 years). A serious problem confronting the Red Maquis was lack of physical fitness of the urban leaders, including Laban.

[23] On the settlement pattern and socio-cultural organization of this area of the Dahra, see the research of Louis Kergoat, a worker priest of the *Petits frères*, who lived close by in a peasant community of the Djebel Bissa from July 1954 to 1958; see 'Paysannerie des Djebels', and 'Paysan au Dahra'.

[24] AOM 1K874, statement of Djelloul ben Ali Allaoui, farmer; see also the statement of Mohamed ben Mohamed Azouni according to whom Zitoufi had adressed the community: 'If you see a stranger in the *douar* going into an Arab café or grocery, or somebody's house, keep that to yourself and don't speak to anyone about it. Behave as if you have seen nothing.'

guns and money from farmers, and the intimidation or assassination of target individuals to prevent informing and to neutralize the agents of the colonial state.

Constructing and Equipping the Caches

Rabah Benhamou's first task was, with the aid of local militants, to create a number of hiding places either by excavating old mine tunnels or through location of natural caves. The first cache was dug out in a ravine close to the Zitoufi farmhouse, and later the maquisards investigated further into the mountainous interior of the Djebel Bissa to locate natural caves close to springs that could serve as the base for other guerrillas that were to arrive later from Miliana and elsewhere.[25] During these early stages most of the peasants drawn into the maquis continued to live at home, only joining the group for night-time actions, while those, like Benhamou, who lived permanently in various dug-out shelters and caves, constituted a hard-core of emerging guerrilla leaders, including a deserter from Blida, later identified as Abdelhamid Gherab from the Laban maquis, and a gendarme from Algiers.[26]

Here we see emerging a distinction between 'professional' combatants (*moudjahidine*) that would, after the Soummam conference of August 1956, be absorbed into regular ALN fighting units, and the mass of peasants that continued to farm the land, but who offered a range of services as auxiliaries (*moussebiline*), from acting as lookouts, guides, and porters to carrying out acts of sabotage destroying farms, crops, and communications. The advantage of using the auxiliaries is that they required no subsistence or housing, and, dressed in their usual peasant clothing, could not be easily identified as guerrillas, merging in perfectly with the routines of rural life. In June and July of 1956, however, Rabah Benhamou was already keen to give his 'army' a regular appearance and when peasants departed from their farmhouses to join a night action he would issue each man with a uniform consisting of a black beret and khaki trousers and jacket, and at the end of the night each fighter would change back into his normal peasant dress. The intention of the PCA leaders that supplied the uniforms seems to have been to impress on rural inhabitants the fact that the guerrillas, far from constituting, as was often claimed in the French media, a rag-tag of 'bandits' or 'terrorists', was an

[25] When the gendarmes inspected the first cache excavated close to the Zoutifi farm, they found a rather primitive shelter two metres in diameter and one and a half metres high that could contain only three recumbent men or five men squatting.

[26] Gherab was identified by several witnesses from a photograph. His presence in the Zitoufi maquis was previously unknown. The accounts in S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 230–1, and R. Gallissot, *Dictionnaire*, 306, claim that after his escape from the Laban massacre he was smuggled into the Oran region.

efficient, well-organized regular unit that had all the hallmarks and prestige of a national force in the making.

Dr Masseboeuf and his wife regularly supplied the maquis group with weapons, uniforms, boots, blankets, and radio batteries, by driving to a prearranged drop-off point on the coastal road, where guerrillas would be waiting. Masseboeuf was able to carry out such liaison work, passing through police check points, under the cover of his professional work.[27]

The Race to Collect Guns

The second key activity of the Zitoufi maquis, and in some ways the most urgent, was to carry out night-time raids on farm houses to appropriate shotguns and pistols, before they could be impounded by the gendarmes. During the Algerian War of Independence the revolutionary movement, as with insurrections in general, was confronted with a major problem of acquiring sufficient arms and ammunition.[28] In the vital early stage of maquis formation, before the ALN could organize international shipments of weapons by sea or across the Moroccan and Tunisian borders, the only way to capture arms was either to steal them from the security forces, as had been achieved by the spectacular Maillot raid, or to levy the hunting guns of rural inhabitants. Only three to seven of the Maillot Sten guns made their way through to the Zitoufi maquis, and during the early night-raids of June and July most of the guerrillas were without firearms of any kind.

The colonial authorities had, since the nineteenth century, introduced a body of legislation that strictly controlled the possession, manufacture, or sale of weapons and gunpowder. A discriminatory system allowed Europeans free access to arms, including defensive '*armes de guerre*', while '*indigènes*' could only possess a hunting rifle under a strict system of registration.[29] The aim was to prevent the danger of armed tribal revolt and banditry.[30] The grant of a licence to own a gun, or to open an Arab café, was one of the perks used by the administration of the *commune mixte* to reward those peasants or local notables that had shown strong loyalty to 'France' and the colonial regime. For the peasants of the Dahra and Ouarsenis the ownership of a hunting gun or revolver carried particular meanings,

[27] AOM 9140/5, statement of Maamar ben Ahmed to the Ténès gendarmes, 17 August 1956. Hadj Zitoufi's nephew Ali ben Ali acted as liaison agent to Masseboeuf by visiting him in his surgery as a patient.

[28] See for example the memoirs of Waruhiu Itote (General China), *'Ma Mau' General* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 54, on this urgent priority in the early formation of the Mau-Mau guerrilla in Kenya.

[29] Emile Larcher, *Traité élémentaire de legislation algérienne* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 3rd edn 1923), 3.549–64.

[30] On the importance of the clandestine arms trade in the Maghreb, see Francesco Correale, *La grande guerre des trafiquants. Le front colonial de l'Occident maghrébin* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014).

a sign of honour and status, and it was only members of a small rural élite that could both afford and display this status symbol.[31] During major state occasions, such as the visit of the governor, or the elaborate festivals enjoyed by local officials and dignitaries, the great *caids* of the Chelif liked to display their power by their ability to summon their retainers, splendidly attired horsemen armed with flintlocks, to take part in the *fantasia* charge. Big landowners like the Saiah, along with the wealthy *colons*, had the political influence to ensure that gun licences were issued to their trusted estate workers, who constituted a body of henchmen.[32]

When the Zitoufi maquis set out at night to locate as many guns as possible, they knew exactly which households owned weapons, in general an élite of better-off peasants that were able to display their status through ownership of a shotgun, a sign also of their influence with the administration. These tended to be older men, the patriarchs of the extended household, who might also have had a past track record, as did the Zitoufi, of nurturing their links to the colonial administration.

This may explain, in part, the particularly abrasive or threatening manner in which Rabah Benhamou led the raiding parties. Witnesses recounted to the gendarme investigators a standard modus operandi. Because of the dispersed settlement the guerrillas were able to surround each isolated farmhouse in turn, where the family head was summoned outside, and Benhamou demanded particular weapons and money. In a typical case, in late June armed men surrounded the *gourbis* of 63-year-old Hadj Boulem ben Yahia Berkane and Benhamou, who always led the group, demanded his rifle and 100,000 francs. When Berkane protested that he had only 10,000 francs, Benhamou tied a rope round his neck, and threatened to drag him to the river to kill him. His son ran out with the gun and 10,000 francs, and Berkane was freed, but was warned, 'if I told anyone or denounced them I would be killed with all my family and my *gourbis*, food reserves and livestock would be destroyed'. The night-time raids were not only intended to commandeer guns and cash, but also to spread a climate of fear that would dissuade inhabitants from informing, and in some instances Benhamou promised that the weapon would be returned if the owner, now compromised, refrained from going to the authorities.

It is evident from the gendarmes investigations that the insurgents did not receive, as was later claimed by official post-Independence FLN historiography, universal support from peasants who were burning to cast off the colonial yoke.

[31] J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 40: in the fraction of Metidja only five men held such a licence. In the vast *douar* Beni Boudaoune authority to hold a rifle was held only by the heads of the twenty-four fractions.

[32] This was similar to the situation in Sicily where the *mafia* had originated with the armed estate guards and enforcers; see Raimondo Catanzaro, *Men of Respect: A Social History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 20, on the '*campieri*' whose superiority over the peasants was symbolized by the authorization to carry arms and to go on horseback, and who were allowed by estate owners to use violence in support of their interests.

On the contrary, Benhamou's methods, far from representing a 'hearts and minds' strategy that was sensitive to the values of peasant society, calculated that terror and a brutal frontal assault was a more effective instrument. However, there were signs of some tension within the guerrilla band over this issue. Benhamou was a potentially violent and volatile man who intimidated not only local peasants, but also members of his own maquis group. When one guerrilla, a fishmonger from Ténès called Mohamed, offered the opinion that deploying men from the *douar* in local raids was dangerous, since they risked being identified, Benhamou fired his revolver and narrowly missed his head. Benhamou shouted, 'You talk too much, here it's me that is in command', and said he would not brook any challenge to his authority. Benhamou showed little hesitation in threatening even those that had risked all by joining the PCA network, like the liaison agent Maamar Mendil, who ran a petrol pump in Ténès. Benhamou told Mendil: 'Since you sell petrol to the army, you must give 100,000 francs to an agent that I will send.'[33]

Benhamou had the kind of violent personality that would often surface in times of unrest, but as a Kabyle who had lived in urban centres like Tizi Ouzou and Ténès, he would probably have had little understanding of the complex social and cultural values of the Dahra peasants. The Zitoufi clan did not take too kindly to this abrasive Kabyle, described by one of them as 'disagreeable', when he arrived in their midst in April 1956, and who proceeded to ride roughshod over local sensibilities.[34]

In a series of night-time meetings of the maquis activists Benhamou spelt out his aims in a terse style:

> he had come with his companions to defend our cause and to achieve a good life. To achieve that we had to create a company and rise up as in Kabylie and everywhere else to kill the French. . . . You must recruit for me everyone that you know and when the others [the maquisards] arrive they will kill all those that refuse to follow us.

Benhamou, pupil of the Spanish anarcho-communist Caracéna, saw the world in terms of a blunt class war, while the Zitoufis, from a tradition of clientelism and *djemâa* politics, recognized another truth, the values of honour and respect for patriarchal elders.

Tensions over the issue of the night-time arms collection crystallized around the case of Mohammed ben Amar Assouni. Six guerrillas surrounded the house of the 57-year-old Assouni on the night of 28 June, and Benhamou, as usual,

[33] AOM 9140/5, statement of Maamar Mendil, 17 August 1956.

[34] G. Donnat, *Afin*, 300, remarks that Benhamou, 'a foreigner in the region', was socially isolated in Ténès where there existed a strong traditional Islamic culture that favoured Arab descent over a Berber identity. 'They considered with some disdain a Kabyle who spoke Arabic poorly and, in addition, had little [Islamic] faith.'

threatened to fire his house unless he handed over his gun, which he did. In departing from the scene Mohamed ben Ali Zitoufi, the leading figure among the Zitoufi sons and cousins, had a major disgreement with Benhamou and argued that the rifle should be returned immediately to Assouni, and it was only several days later that Benhamou finally backed down on the issue. Why the Zitoufi insisted on this point is unclear, but it appears to have related to a number of things. The Zitoufi believed that each owner of a gun should be reassured of its quick return, on condition that he guarantee not to inform the authorities, while Benhamou was in favour of a definitive appropriation, especially as he was committed to sending the weapons to assist other emerging maquis groups in the Chelif valley.

Zitoufi knew that the extended Assouni family was influential, and pressing them too hard ran the risk of a denunciation. The chances of this were high since, as Assouni warned the guerrillas, his rifle was registered with the authorities, and at some stage the gendarmes were bound to come and carry out a check.[35] The Assouni were also respected neighbours with whom the Zitoufi socialized on an everyday basis, and a few days later, on 2 July, Hadj Zitoufi offered, as he often did for villagers, to give Amar Assouni a lift in his car to Ténès to make arrangements for his daughter's wedding. It was on this occasion, Assouni told the gendarmes, that Brahim Zitoufi had returned his rifle that had been concealed in a stack of barley. However, Brahim still demanded payment of 5,000 francs, and made a parting threat: 'Listen, don't say anything about this if you don't wish to die. I will personally see that you are killed if you talk.'

When the gendarmes came to carry out a first investigation in the *douar* on 9 July, Assouni kept silent, but the maquisards remained under the constant threat of denunciation, creating a tense climate of suspicion and fear in which the only recourse of the guerrillas was to offer more threats. There was always a risk that Benhamou's brutal approach would tip a victim, who felt humiliated by the procedure, into resistance. The elderly Hadj Berkane, nine days after the raid on his *gourbis*, had the courage to tell Hocine Zitoufi that if his gun was not returned he would go to the authorities, to which Hocine agreed, but with the usual blunt warning, 'if I had the misfortune to report the smallest detail I would be burned without pity'. But soon the inevitable happened and Abdelkader Azzouni went to the police following a harrowing experience during which Benhamou had fired two shots close to his head, and then searched his house, and left with a watch, a cigarette lighter, and 45,000 francs, an action that had all the appearances of criminal theft, rather than a collection for the nationalist cause.[36]

[35] AOM 1K692, monthly report CM Chelif for July 1956; in the race between the ALN and the gendarmerie to seize or impound all weapons, the former used the ploy of issuing a false receipt, even when the gun was still in the possession of the owner.

[36] Several witnesses made statements in which they described the Zitoufi maquisards as 'bandits', engaged in criminal acts, rather than as liberation fighters.

The next day, 9 July, the gendarmes carried out a first raid on the *douar* and, although they met a wall of silence, Benhamou was forced to flee from the area and to lie low with his brother-in-law near Ténès for some time. During the celebration of Aid-el-Kébir on 19 July, Hadj Zitoufi, in his speech to the gathered villagers, finally tried to recapture the initiative by using his moral authority to retain the unity of the *douar*:

> I see that Azzouni Abdelkader has not come to the fête. He is put out because his gun has been taken. It's not my fault. As long as those people [guerrillas] were staying with me nobody in the *douar* could complain. The problems started when they went to Hendaoui's house. You have seen very well how the gun of Mohammed Ben Amar [Assouni] was returned thanks to my sons.

Hadj Zitoufi was clearly trying to distance himself from the 'outsiders', including Benhamou, who were seen as responsible for actions that were unacceptable to the community, including the seizure of guns from different farmhouses. But his sons had shown their respect for neighbours by ensuring the return of the weapons, and the case of Amar Assouni was held up as an exemplary demonstration of this good will.[37]

The battle to gain control of local guns and ammunition shows how at the micro-level the implantation of guerrilla units in the mountain society was a complex process, in which the *douar* community, normally quite tranquil under the control of Hadj Zitoufi, was subject to internal tensions that threatened to tear the small society apart. As Stathis Kaylvas has shown, civil wars have the capacity, like the opening of a Pandora's box, to rip aside the normal regulation of disputes and to release destructive forces. In his comparative model Kalyvas argues that villages caught up in civil war stood the best chance of avoiding violence where elders were able to retain a degree of cohesion rather than descending into a spiral of informing and counter-violence. Zitoufi attempted, as president of the *djemâa*, to retain such unity, one that depended on a law of silence, but failed to hold the line and soon he, along with his sons and nephews, were to end up in detention, where they would remain for the duration of the war. It can be seen why the ability of guerrillas to negotiate around the extraordinary complex field of village family relations and honour depended on a close 'insider' knowledge of the community, while an outsider like the Kabyle Benhamou ran a high risk of alienating potential support and driving entire family blocks into a sullen opposition.

[37] On 9 July, after the gendarmes' visit, Abdelkader ben Hadj Hendaoui admitted to Brahim Zoutifi that he had reported the theft of his revolver. Brahim replied, 'Why did you report this? If you had said nothing, we would have returned it. It's we who will take care of that personally. You saw very well how we returned [the gun] to Assouni Mohamed ben Amar.'

The inhabitants of the *douar* Taourira were not, it should be recognized, faced with a simple choice between violent maquisards and a benevolent colonial state, since the gendarmes could be every bit as brutal. The gendarmes of Francis Garnier that carried out the investigation of the Zitoufi maquis had a reputation for assault and torture, as did other units in the Dahra. In May 1956, for example, several villagers and the *caid* of the *douar* Beni Bou Mileuk, just south-east of Taourira, lodged complaints that gendarmes from Rouina, claiming to be searching for weapons held by suspected terrorists, entered a number of *gourbis* and pillaged the interiors, smashed jars of semolina, eggs, cereals, and milk, stole jewellery, shot a dog, and sexually assaulted the women. Far from holding weapons of war, as the gendarmes claimed, the peasants' hunting rifles were registered. Several men were taken into detention, one of whom, Lakhdar Cherief, claimed that he had been tortured with electricity during his interrogation.[38] As guerrilla war entered the mountainous interior, the peasantry frequently found themselves caught in the middle between colonial and nationalist coercive violence, a situation in which rural leaders like Hadj Zitoufi deployed all their skills to steer a precarious path.

Informing and the Logic of Terror

The last element in the activities of the Zitoufi maquis I want to consider is the way that it set about trying to eliminate or assassinate all the local agents of the colonial state, the *caids*, forest guards, SAS officers, and, if necessary, compliant fraction heads. The effective functioning of the *commune mixte* administration was crucially dependent on a system of indirect rule, and without the flow of intelligence from the *caids*, the administrator was blind to the changing conditions in the mountainous interior. Rabah Benhamou, as leader of guerrilla operations, informed the maquis group that the purpose of their actions 'was intended to rally all the population to our cause and to systematically destroy all the individuals who remained under submission to the authority of the French'. As Hocine ben Hadj Zitoufi confessed to the gendarmes: 'We planned to kill the guards (*goumiers*) of the SAS captain, the *caid* Hocine Mokrani and [the informer] Attaf Aissa. In the *douar* Taourira we had to kill the farmer Vuigier and the field guard.' According to the labourer M'Hamed ben Ahmed Hendaoui, a member of the maquis, Hadj Zitoufi was so worried that his own brother Ali Harzalla might denounce them, that he thought it necessary to kill or incapacitate him in some way. Dr Masseboeuf, who passed instructions from Babou down to the Zitoufi group, tried to rein in the hot-headed Benhamou by ordering him to desist from

[38] AOM 12CAB155, complaint by the *caid* of the *douar* Beni Bou Mileuk to administrator CM Cherchell, 11 May 1956; report of investigation by Lieutenant Kilque, SAS of Bouyamine, 14 May 1956.

assassinations, and to focus on the more urgent priority of collecting arms. Masseboeuf, after the killing of four suspected informers in the *douar* Bou Rached by the Laban maquis on 3 June, was well aware of the extent to which careless adventurism risked provoking a rapid and dangerous military response that could prove fatal to the infant maquis.[39] This was precisely the mistake made by the Zitoufi maquis when on the night of 26 July it carried out the dramatic assassination of Lahcène or 'Alexandre' Boualam.

'Si Lassen', as he was known, brother of the *bachaga* Boualam, was a retired gendarme who farmed the family lands in the *douar* Taourira and, although not particularly wealthy, he belonged to the class of relatively well-to-do middle peasants. One sign of this relative standing was the fact that he did not live in the standard thatched *gourbis*, but in what one maquisards described as an 'Arab'-style building, with pantile roof and a central courtyard. In a carefully planned operation the Zitoufi maquis moved at night through the mountains to Sidi Bouissi, where it joined up with a bigger group of guerrillas that had travelled in from the east, perhaps from Beni Haoua or Sinfita and surrounded the farmhouse. Several men climbed onto the roof and after Boualam was finally forced to come outside Benhamou said to him, 'You are an informer for the French administration and we are going to kill you. Say your prayers', and he was executed with two or three shots.[40]

This politically important assassination was not the brain-child of Benhamou alone, but rather a collective decision that was discussed by the maquis group as a whole at a meeting held the day before and it was decided that agents should be dispatched to Ténès to receive precise instructions and to arrange for the presence of a back-up group from outside.[41] Since the military elimination of the Laban maquis on 5 June, the *bachaga* Boualam had received enormous publicity in the national press as the symbol of the 'tribal' leader true to France, who had played a key role, along with his trusty men of the Beni Boudouane, in eliminating the terrorists. The killing of his brother 'Si Lassen' was calculated to send a clear message: this was revenge of a traditional vendetta type, in which all members of an enemy clan, including women and children, might be seen as legitimate targets. There was no security for collaborators and the killing of 'Si Lassen' sent a powerful warning to all the local *caids* and fraction chiefs.[42] At the same time,

[39] G. Donnat, *Afin*, 328, notes that both he and Masseboeuf were sceptical and anxious at the prospect of the PCA entry into an armed insurrection: 'At this time the FLN began to organize individual attacks against targets that were neither military nor strategic, often affecting innocent victims. We did not agree with this way of making war and we only wished to participate in actions that had been well prepared, against quite precise targets, and that did not risk shedding the blood of no matter who.'

[40] Statement of Mohamed ben Ali Zitoufi.

[41] Statement of M'Hamed ben Ahmed Hendaoui, labourer aged 29 years.

[42] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 120–2, gives a rather elaborate and semi-fictionalized account of the killing, which he wrongly placed on 21 July, and described the maquis leader as 'Serafini' [sic], 'influential member of the Communist Party', who then proceeded, he claims, to sack the house for

the individual killing and counter-assassination helped establish the pattern of a cycle of deepening violence so symptomatic of a civil war. The intimate nature of such violence, in which victims and killers lived together in a small, face-to-face society, is illustrated by the fact that about ten days earlier Maamar Mendil had agreed to drive Hadj Zitoufi in his car, along with Alexandre Boualam, from Ténès to Orleansville to see the administration in relation to earthquake reconstruction. The two men, he said, were in perfect agreement and they had gone to the sub-prefecture together.[43]

Mohamed ben Ali Ramdani, a 46-year-old labourer who made a witness statement hostile to the Zitoufi's, said he was concerned by Boualam's killing: 'In effect his father and mine were close friends and just this year I went to spend a day assisting him during the harvest and to prove my friendship.' Relations between families in the *douar*, as in all peasant societies, were based on an extraordinary complex web of alliances, based on links of marriage, joint assistance in heavy labour (*twiza*), and communal rituals of feasting during weddings and religious celebrations. As Kalyvas has demonstrated such quotidian alliances or divisions could, under the conditions of civil war, slide all too easily into informing and devastating forms of tit-for-tat violence that tore communities apart.

The Transition from Communist to ALN Maquis in Ténès

This final part of the chapter examines the way in which the PCA, through central negotiation with the FLN in June 1956, arrived at an agreement for the dissolution of the CDL, and for all communist maquisards to transfer on an individual basis into the ranks of the ALN. In a communiqué dated 1 July the PCA sent out an order for all active maquisards to accept control by the FLN and to cut links to the party.[44] Nowhere in the archive documents relating to the Zitoufi maquis is there any indication of such a transfer of power. In reality Benhamou and the local FLN had been cooperating since the end of May, if not earlier, so that all that we have said so far about the activities of the Zitoufi maquis represented as much a pro-FLN as a communist initiative.[45] By chance one of the teachers working under

jewellery and money, beat up 'Si Lassen', 'despite the supplications of his wife and our mother', and not only shot him, but stabbed him repeatedly with a knife. The *bachaga* memoirs dwell much on this, and other assassinations of his family, including that of his second son Abdelkader on 28 January 1958. The extensive family martyrology served to emphasize the *bachaga*'s own costly personal sacrifice: 'The rebels aimed through these crimes, and through my family, to make me pay for my fidelity to France.'

[43] AOM 9140/5, statement of Maamar Mendil, Ténès *géndarmerie*, 17 August 1956.

[44] H. Alleg (ed.), *La guerre d'Algérie*, 2.127–9, 191–5, for a detailed analysis of the agreement, and the text of 12 July in vol. 3. annex, 532–4.

[45] H. Alleg (ed.), *La guerre d'Algérie*, 2.128, in some parts of Algeria, as near Tlemçen, communist militants were integrated on an individual basis into the ALN as early as March 1956.

Gaston Donnat, a professor of Arabic called Mohamed Eddaikra, turned out to be the head of the FLN in Ténès.[46] In about May 1956 Eddaikra passed on to Donnat an urgent message from Si M'Hamed, ALN commander of the region, who was irritated by the activities of the communist guerrilla in his area, and issued an ultimatum that unless it was immediately dissolved he would order ALN units to attack the PCA combatants. The communists had chosen to place the Laban and Zitoufi maquis in an area in which there was, as yet, a weak or non-existent ALN presence and Si M'Hamed was angered to find that the communists were building up a strong presence before he could put his own organization in place.[47] Babou was immediately informed and, with the assistance of Donnat, arranged a top-secret meeting with Si M'Hamed at the school in Ténès; after a long discussion agreement was reached to dissolve the CDL, and Babou himself was integrated into the *État-major* of *wilaya* 4. Donnat placed this meeting in late May 1956, which suggests that grassroots pressure was impelling communists at the local level to join up with the ALN insurrection in advance of the Central Committee accord of 1 July to integrate into the FLN ranks.[48] Benhamou had, quite early in 1956, already established close links with the FLN in Ténès, and after the arrest of the Zitoufi men in August 1956 he appears to have seamlessly carried his maquis group over into the ALN.

From June onwards, in other parts of the Chelif, three of the leading figures from the Laban group who had escaped the French encirclement joined the ALN and provided continuity in the transfer of the PCA networks into the new apparatus. Perhaps it was not just an accident, but deliberate communist policy, to send each of these key ex-CDL leaders into separate guerrilla groups that were being formed. Abdelhamid Gherab, after his escape to Orleansville was sent north to Ténès to join the Zitoufi maquis, and Abdelhamid Boudiaf returned to his old base in Medjadja where he continued to expand the guerrilla network. When the ALN officers Djillali Bounaama, future head of *wilaya* 4, and Ben Mahdjoub, moved up to Medjadja they were surprised to find such an elaborate peasant organization already in place.[49] The third escapee, Mustapha Saadoun, made his way north-east, across the Chelif Valley, to the farmhouse of Khelladi Smain, from

[46] Mohamed Eddaikra (1929–57), a *Ulema* supporter, came from an old religious family that inhabited the ancient casbah of Vieux Ténès. Educated in the Koranic school of the Mosque of Sidi Maiza, and the *medersa* of Sidi Abderrahmane in Algiers, he taught Arabic in Ténès from 1951 to 1955. The Baroin Report (AOM 4i209) has much on his networks in Ténès, and transcript of a letter to his father, dated 2 September, on his decision to join the maquis where, as 'Commander Si Abdelmadjid', he died in action in December 1956.

[47] G. Donnat, *Afin*, 336.

[48] An indication of the extraordinary close, informal contacts between communist and FLN militants in the small-town social circles of Orleansville and Ténès, well before any formal merger, can be seen from the fact that Michel Martini, *Chroniques*, 78–9, was a close friend of the teacher Mahdi, head of the ALN in the town, while Gaston Donnat, *Afin*, 308–9, discovered that Mohamed Eddaikra, a member of his own teaching staff, was head of the ALN in Ténès.

[49] S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 240–2.

where he was directed into a new maquis HQ that the ALN was forming by early July 1956 in the *douar* Béni Bou Mileuk.[50] By August three FLN-PCA maquis centres had found a foothold in the CM of Ténès at Taourira, Beni Haoua, and Sinfita, and were in close contact with each other through liaison agents, and with four other neighbouring maquis groups in Beni Bou Mileuk, Tacheta, Beni Rached, and Medjadja (see Map 6).

However, not was all plain sailing for the ex-communist guerrillas at Independence since they were treated with deep hostility and suspicion by many FLN militants and often became the target of discriminatory treatment.[51] The Zitoufi family was itself the subject of such FLN and official, post-Independence amnesia. Following the arrest and imprisonment of Hadj Zitoufi and his sons, the army set about a standard practice, exacting revenge on the entire family group, not by destroying their farm as was often the case, but by installing an army unit in the sacred space of the home.[52] A SAS report noted in October that one of the Zitoufi sons, Ali, had died on 2 August and, in the absence of further information, it seems likely that he had been killed by the security forces during an 'escape' or interrogation.[53]

The Zitoufi family, probably because of their communist affiliations, was after independence politically marginalized by the dominant FLN party which blocked the official registration of the Zitoufi as *moudjahids*.[54] During the 1980s, however, the Zitoufi family recovered its economic and political power in the region of Ténès, mainly through the influential figure of Hadj Idriss Zitoufi, who became president of the *Assemblée populaire communale* (APC) of Oued Goussine, deputy of the RND in the national assembly, and who built up a considerable fortune as an entrepreneur in the tourist, hotel, and transport industry. But Driss Zitoufi is best known as the chief spokesman for the sinister 'Patriot' auto-defense militias that engaged in a 'dirty war' against the Islamists during the dark decade of 1992–2002. The human rights activist Dr Salah-Eddine Sidhoum has characterized Driss Zitoufi as a 'warlord', a man much feared in the Ténès region, and one

[50] M. Rebah, *Des chemins*, 39–42.

[51] A. Drew, *We Are No Longer*, 206–9 and E. Sivan, *Communisme*, 238–40, note that some of those integrated into the ALN were later executed or assigned the most dangerous missions.

[52] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 107; AOM 9140/152, according to an SAS informer, 13 August 1956, rumours were spreading that Hadj Zitoufi's wives had been raped by soldiers. Historians of the Algerian War have, in general, failed to notice that the French army and police forces frequently, even systematically, sought to revenge themselves on known guerrilla fighters by targeting their static and vulnerable families and subjecting them to house destruction, murder, and imprisonment.

[53] AOM 9140/152, intelligence report of SAS officer, Captain Quieffan, Francis Garnier, 21 October 1956. An informer claimed that Behamou, now an ALN commander, had married Ali Zitoufi's widow and visited her regularly.

[54] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 17, 107. The highly religious Krimi clearly disliked the Zitoufi family intensely and, while concealing their role in the resistance movement, presented them as the archetypal *caids* that acted as agents of colonialism in oppressing the peasantry.

who by recruiting many of the veterans of the ALN replayed the long hidden tensions of the civil war of 1954–62.[55]

In conclusion, the gendarmes' investigation of the Zitoufi maquis provides close 'inside' detail that confirms a general pattern of guerrilla organization that can be gleaned from other sources. Political leadership by the peasantry at the level of the fraction and *douar* was provided by men who belonged to relatively well-to-do families, a middle peasantry that through their access to education, promotion of sons into the army, *caidat*, or lower rungs of the local administration could command a degree of authority among the local population, while simultaneously maintaining good working relations with the state and its agents. The political skill of a man like Hadj Zitoufi rested on his ability to walk the tightrope between simultaneously gaining a maximum of material rewards from government, from investment in *pistes*, schools, employment, earthquake relief, and other benefits, while protecting his 'client' constituents from heavy taxes, conscription, forest fines, and other demands of the colonial state.

As throughout the Chelif region, the fulcrum of this balancing act shifted during the 1940s as Zitoufi, like other *djemâa* presidents, became converted to nationalism, communism, and syndicalism and assumed an oppositional role against the *caids*. The *douar* population were internally split along a myriad of complex, micro-level divisions between supporters of the *caid* and his headmen and the *djemâa* president and the militants inscribed on his party list. The great danger presented to the community at the moment that the first guerrilla forces began to insert themselves in their midst was that it could tip the everyday, latent animosities into informing or collaborating with the incumbent regime, triggering a violent riposte. Hadj Zitoufi attempted to maintain the unity of the fractions and *douar* through a form of *omerta* that stood the best chance of protecting the community, but sometimes, as here, the pressure of external forces, the gendarmerie, the SAS, and army, fractured the traditional defences of the peasantry and drove them towards civil war.

The next chapter moves on to see how the early FLN guerrilla movement in the Chelif attempted to deal with such tensions.

[55] See the long report of 2003 by Dr Salah-Eddine Sidoum for Algeria-Watch, reprinted in an online blog by *Le quotidien d'Algérie* on 13 July 2011.

14
Organization of the Early ALN Guerrilla, 1954–7

Historians, preoccupied by the dramatic insurrection of 1 November 1954, have often given the impression that the War of Independence concerned two primary actors, the FLN that was launched on that night, and the colonial power. However, this is to misread the situation in the early stages of the revolt, since the FLN, a breakaway fraction of the PPA-MTLD, was numerically small, weak, and as yet unknown to most Algerians. In the Chelif region, as in many other parts of Algeria, the Messalists (soon to be renamed the MNA) continued to remain the dominant nationalist force, occupying the existing party organizations, and with the support of the older, most experienced militants. Historians have still to look closely at how the FLN was able not only to survive in the face of the French military, but at the same time to expand geographically to penetrate the Messalist networks and to win over its militants.[1]

Mustapha Ferroukhi, born in Miliana in 1922, played a key role in preparing the CRUA breakaway from the Messalists in the Miliana Duperré region well before November 1954, and thus opened a bridgehead for the later penetration of the FLN in the eastern Chelif valley.[2] Ferroukhi, a member of the MTLD Central Committee and elected a deputy to the Algerian Assembly in April 1948, frequently campaigned in Duperré and the surrounding *douars* as a leading advocate of the *Front algérien* that worked to unite the PCA, MTLD, UDMA, and *Ulema*.[3] In late November 1954 Ferroukhi was imprisoned at Serkadji in Algiers and, on

[1] One of the best treatments is M. Harbi, *Le FLN*, ch. 11, 'Guerre dans la guerre: le FLN contre le MNA', 143–62. The numerous autobiographical accounts by FLN veterans in *wilaya* 4 that have proliferated in recent years usually make no mention of the bloody fratricidal struggle, an amnesia that stems from the urge to uphold a myth of heroic nationalist unity: see, for example, Mohamed Chérif Ould El Hocine, *De la Résistance à la Guerre d'Indépendance 1830–1962* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, 2010), 257–343, on his experience in an ALN commando of the eastern Chelif region in 1956–9.

[2] AOM 1K/349, monthly report sub-prefect of Miliana, April 1954; Ferroukhi was organizing meetings of MTLD militants in the region to explain the nature of the internal crisis of the party, and the section backed him in his opposition to Messali Hadj.

[3] On Ferroukhi, see B. Stora, *Dictionnaire*, 284; *El Moudjahid*, 9 October 2016, online at <http://www.elmoudjahid.com.fr/actualites/100203>. After joining the PPA in 1942, Ferroukhi studied for a diploma in Islamic studies in the *medersa* of Algiers, before becoming a full-time senior activist in the MTLD in which he joined the anti-Messali tendency. After escaping in 1956–7 via France to Tunisia, he became a leading figure in the GPRA and was appointed as ambassador to China but died en route in a plane crash near Kiev in 1960.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

his release in April 1955 was placed under house arrest (*assignation à residence*) in Miliana where he and his relatives were subjected to constant surveillance by police agents and informers. By December 1955 the security services suspected that a guerrilla force was being formed in the Bou Rached and Zeddine area, and the sub-prefect of Miliana was asked by the prefect of Algiers to carry out an investigation. The police of Miliana uncovered an extensive network of militants in the *douar* Bou Rached that had been organized by Larbi Bouabdallah, an accountant in Duperré, described as a trusted confidant of Ferroukhi.[4] The shifting battle between the embryo FLN and the older, well-established Messalist networks, now rebranded the MNA, for control of the Chelif was highly confused, with a constantly shifting and uneven patchwork of allegiances.[5] The archives reveal, however, a general east to west penetration of the FLN along the corridor of the Chelif valley in the direction of Orleansville where the Front, confronted by a Messalist fortress in the shanty towns of Bocca Sahnoun and La Ferme, entered into a civil war.

Veteran Messalist militants faced a confused situation since they had no idea as to who or what the mysterious new FLN force was that was first proclaimed by radio from Egypt on the night of 1 November. For many it was months before they began to make contact with the infant organization before deciding whether to change camp or not. For example, the miner Djilali Bounaama, head of the PPA *kasma* in Molière, was a delegate to the congress in Hornu, Belgium, on 13–15 July 1954, and remained with the Messalists at the definitive split in the party (see Chapter 10). Arrested on 4 November, along with many MTLD militants, and imprisoned in Serkadji, by the time of his release in October 1955 he immediately joined the FLN maquis. Messalist activists either decided to remain loyal to the MNA or changed camp to the FLN individually or in small groups. In early 1956, for example, a number of MNA groups, including over sixty militants from Rouina, Oued Fodda, Ouarsenis, and Orleansville under Abdallah Ben Mahdjoub, rallied to the FLN, as did another group of fifty men from Zaccar and Affreville, under Bouamrani.[6]

By March 1956 intelligence reports noted that a dirty war (*lutte sournois*) between the two factions had been going on for some while in Orleansville, and that the FLN had won over most of the MNA militants and was plotting to assassinate the two leaders Mohammed Maroc and Abdelkader Foudad.[7]

[4] AOM 91/5Q/138, report of PRG, Miliana, 2 December 1955 that, using intelligence received from the *caid* of Bou Rached, Hadj Sadok, identified seventeen militants, among them Abdelkader Sahnoune and Tahar ben Mekki Radja, a member of the *djemâa*, who frequently travelled as an agent to Algiers and Constantine.

[5] M. Harbi, *Le FLN*, 150, notes that by 1956 the FLN was very active in the Mitidja plain, but had not yet penetrated into the Chelif valley. The Messalists were still dominant in Affreville and Orleansville on the eve of the revolt, AOM 1k/349, sub-prefect Miliana, monthly report, September 1954.

[6] N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 434.

[7] AOM 4i206, RG Orleansville, 9 March 1956.

The MNA was mainly urban-based, with several cells operating in the shanty towns and suburbs of Bocca Sahnoun and La Ferme, but, like the PCA and FLN, it was attempting by November 1955 to create a seperate guerrilla force in the Ouarsenis and Dahra. The complex and messy battle between the two organizations thus spread out into the surrounding *douars*. By August 1956 there were three MNA guerrilla bands in the region, one of them, a group of fifteen men armed with shotguns seized in night-time raids from farmers, was operating in the Ouarsenis under Mohamed Serbah ('Si Kaddour'). A second group of thirty men was located near Kherba under Benmoussa Tarkoun ('Si Khaled'), and a small, ill-equipped band of ten men under M'Hamed Bouzid was circulating near Ponteba. However, a major blow was delivered to the MNA maquisards when the urban leaders, on whom they depended for supplies, were arrested on 31 August 1956.[8] By the autumn of 1956 the ALN had become dominant in the Chelif when the French army identified some nineteen FLN groups operating in the Orleansville region, with a total of some 778 to 823 armed men, five times more numerous than the five MNA groups with 165 to 170 men.[9] While the MNA was able to cling on in Orleansville and reconstituted new terrorist cells, it suffered a further blow when its key members were tracked down and arrested by the police in October 1957.[10]

The existence of highly mobile guerrilla bands of different political persuasion, but in every way identical in dress and comportment, confronted peasant communities with complex, but critical decisions. The mountain peasants could find themselves caught between four or five quite different armed forces, the MNA, PCA, and ALN, the 'third force' of the warlord 'Kobus', and French army, *harkis*, and gendarmerie units, each extracting weapons, cash, and food supplies, while threatening violence for any form of 'collaboration' with their opponents. In this situation villagers resorted to their traditional line of defence when faced with the encroachment of 'foreign' forces, usually agents of the state, a strategy of silence, pretended ignorance, or '*attentisme*', an avoidance of any verbal opinion or other act that could be construed as a statement of political support for one side or another.[11] In his memoirs Lakhdar Bouragaa recounts how, as a 21-year-old on his demobilization in early 1956, he joined the ALN maquis near his home village of El Omaria in the Blida Atlas. He describes how men from his *douar* were divided between the MNA and ALN, but the former was much stronger and better

[8] AOM 1K874, RG Orleansville, 1 September 1956. The five militants arrested, aged from 18 to 42 years, were Abderrahmane Achit-Henni, Messaoud Alik, Mohamed Messaoudi, Ahmed Benmahammed, and Bencherqui Tadjine, all resident in Orleansville or its suburbs. Important liaison meetings between the urban militants and maquisards were held in the home of El Hadj in Medjadja.

[9] Figures adapted from an undated military report, but from about late October 1956, reproduced in N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 465–7.

[10] AOM 9140/5, Orleansville police report, 23 October 1957. The head of the cell, Mohamed Bourahla ('Maiza'), a welder, lived, as did the other militants arrested, at La Ferme.

[11] On such defensive strategies, see my chapter, 'The "Silent Native". Attentisme, Being Compromised, and Banal Terror during the Algerian War of Independence, 1954–1962', in M. Thomas (ed.), *The French Colonial Mind*, 2.283–303.

armed, until the FLN was able to gain access to ten of the Maillot Sten guns to wipe out the MNA in May 1956.[12] Until then, 'the population was aware of the existence of two maquis organizations, but it was difficult to distinguish between groups that came at night, declared themselves for independence, and dressed, spoke and organized in the same manner'.[13]

The early attempts of the ALN to organize its guerrilla base in the Dahra and Ouarsenis, which we examine next, needs to be understood within the context of this chaotic civil war that reached into the *douars*.[14] The 'official' FLN story of the war, a Manichaean view of rural insurrection in which a united block of nationalists was pitched against the French forces, has served to obscure the complex reality of the situation in the Ouarsenis, Dahra, and elsewhere. The map of the rate of penetration and consolidation of the ALN guerrilla presence in the Chelif mountains between late 1954 and early 1958 shows an extraordinarily dense patchwork quilt, a spatial distribution that changed constantly through time.[15] The inhabitants of one hamlet might be in total support of the ALN, while a few kilometres away another village, under the control of a conservative *marabout*, might seek alliance with the French, with all kinds of gradations in between.

The ALN and Strategies of Early Contact with Mountain Communities

The remaining part of this chapter looks at the formation of the early ALN maquis in the Chelif region, a phase during which guerrilla forces were particularly fragile and vulnerable, until they could make the transition to constructing a secure and stable base among the local population. As we have seen the PPA, like the Communist Party, had engaged in organizational work to penetrate and

[12] By late 1956 the MNA was rapidly disintegrating as a force in the Chelif, and militants either moved into the FLN or into the pro-French *harkis* of the *bachaga* Boualam and the 'third force' army of 'Kobus', Djilali Belhadj; see AOM 9140/5, Orleansville police report, 23 October 1957, Ahmed Hadj, Mohamed Mezioud, and Larbi Mesbah, last survivors of an MNA terrorist cell in Orleansville, had left the town to join the Boualam force.

[13] Lakhdar Bouragaa, *Les hommes de Mokorno. Mémoires*, 14–16, 46–8. This valuable autobiography, translated from the Arabic edition, can be found on line. It is one of the rare sources that describe the conflict between, and displacement of, the Messalists by the FLN in rural Algeria during 1955–7. Bouragaa was to become a leading officer in *wilaya* 4.

[14] On a similar situation of ALN-MNA conflict in the region of Aumale, see my study, *Burning the Veil*, 231–3. A SAS officer reported of the anarchic situation, 'the different organizations are so closely intermingled that it is often difficult to identify them. Overall the population of these regions is disconcerted and pulls back further into itself'; AOM 3SAS18, ELA Aumale, 15 February–15 March 1960.

[15] French COIN specialists used colour-coded maps to chart the changing distribution of FLN control of the Chelif *douars* using a range of quantifiable metrics such as the percentage of rural taxes collected. The US army later used similar computerized systems to map levels of Vietminh control of Vietnam; see S. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Civil War*, 210–11. The Americans used five grades of insurgent penetration, as did the French.

propagandize rural society. Those plain-to-mountain networks, which prepared the way for the later insertion of guerrillas, had not achieved a uniform diffusion into the *douars*, but created a capillary network that branched into the isolated interior along the lines of communication, roads, and tracks. Among the key agents who facilitated radical networks were bus drivers, cattle and grain dealers, and mobile *commerçants* that travelled by car and van to the rural markets and carried supplies from the towns to small village grocers.[16] Abderrahmane Krimi recounts how as early as 1955 he opened a small village shop in a hut at Boucheghal, located east of Ténès in the same *douar* as the Zitoufi communists, and bought an old car. Under the cover of a travelling dealer going from market to market, he was able to transmit information, tracts, and a range of foodstuffs and materials to stock the hidden caches being prepared for the ALN guerrilla. His shop also served as a place where militants could meet: 'It served as a gathering place during the preparatory phase and afterwards, right up to its demolition by the French tanks and my going into the maquis.'[17]

A particularly important source on the early formation of the ALN maquis are the memoirs of Rémy Madoui, who came from a prestigious family that owned a farm near Teniet el Haad in the Ouarsenis, where his grandfather had been *agha* of the Ouled Sidi M'Hamed.[18] His father, a functionary in the *commune mixte* administration, had moved down to the village of Pont du Caid in the Chelif piedmont south of Affreville, but he and his sons continued to work the family lands. Rémy Madoui thus came from a typical middle peasant background, and received a lycée education in Afffreville.

Madoui, who joined the ALN maquis in the Ouarsenis in early 1955, recounts how vulnerable they were, a small, badly armed and equiped group that was outnumbered by hundreds of better-armed peasants that could have readily overwhelmed them. Madoui's first experience in the maquis was of interminable night marches, during which the group survived on meagre rations of dry flat-bread (*galettes*), accompanied by an egg, an onion, tinned sardines, or a small portion of cheese.

> The situation was not brilliant: a lack of money, no arms, no fighting units, no food, and little support from the people.... In 1955 we could count very few villages where we were received with open arms and where we could feel safe.... We only survived.... It was a period of heart-breaking isolation, of immeasurable discouragement: the people that we were burning to liberate wanted nothing to

[16] AOM 9140/175, PRG Orleansville to RG Algiers, 8 October 1956, reported on Abderrahmane Fellagh, FLN 'an intelligence and liaison agent', born in the *douar* Sidi Larouissi, 5 July 1922, who travelled through the Ouarsenis selling household goods from a Citroen van, with the advertising sign, 'Stop me! I bring you comfort!'. He was responsible for co-ordinating rebel bands in the interior.

[17] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 41.

[18] Rémy Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha, officier français et déserteur. Du FLN à l'OAS* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

> do with us. During the long year 1955 our relationship with the Algerian population went from total discouragement to sudden exaltation when a family or village tolerated our presence.[19]

Nothing could be further from the official FLN historiography of peasant masses welcoming with open arms the heroic sons of the revolution.

During the first two years of guerrilla formation, prior to the Soummam conference of August 1956, decision-making in the ALN remained decentralized and commanders at the *wilaya* and zonal (*mintaqa*) level had considerable autonomy, a situation in which the guerrilla forces gradually shaped and refined their structures and practice in a pragmatic or ad hoc way in relation to the specific social and environmental context in which they found themselves. In Zone or *mintaqa* 3, which corresponded to the Ouarsenis, the ALN commanders began to develop a quite specific strategy, as they expanded into new areas, for taking control of a *douar* or fraction with which they had had little if any previous contact.

Madoui recounts how the key leaders of *mintaqa* 3 under the command of Ahmed Alili ('Si Baghdadi') met during October 1955 to spend a month of intense debate and training in guerrilla warfare. Among those present were Si Lakhdar Bouchemaa, Captain of the Ténès Zone 4, and Ahmed Bougara ('Si M'Hamed') and the former Ouarsenis miner Djilalli Bounaama ('Si Mohamed') who would later become commanders of *wilaya* 4. During the long discussions that took place it was recognized that the FLN had failed to gain support among the mountain people who were exposed to the brutality of the French army and, even if they favoured the idea of independence, were not convinced that the guerrillas could achieve this goal. A change in strategy was urgently required to win over the population.

As Rémy Madoui noted, as outsiders they were new to the area, but instead of listening to the peasants, they talked down to them as if 'we alone possessed the truth that we had a duty to develop and impose on others. The people felt as we did, and they understood better than us the colonial system, the poverty, the loss of dignity, self-sacrifice and liberty.'[20] The guerrillas needed to listen carefully to the peasants, even if they were illiterate, show a degree of empathy, and adopt a language or discourse that they would find meaningful.

It was of particular importance that the ALN understood the traditional relations of power within the *commune mixte*, and how the *caids*, and fraction *kebirs* related to the micro-community and to the family cells that composed it. The ALN guerrilla, at the point of insertion into the mountains, was numerically weak and isolated and its best chance of finding an anchorage was to work with

[19] R. Madoui, *J'ai été*, 43–4.

[20] R. Madoui, *J'ai été*, 51.

the grain of the colonial administrative structure at the grassroots and to turn it to its advantage.

Historians, following the nationalist discourse of Messali Hadj and his followers, have described the War of Independence in rural Algeria as one in which the liberation struggle was particularly aimed at the hated class of the *caids*, the key instrument of colonial oppression in the *douars*. But this was far from being the case. Rémy Madoui, son of a *commune mixte* official, along with numerous other FLN leaders who came from *caid* or administrative families, had a first-hand knowledge of how the machinery of colonial government worked in the *douars*, and sought to subvert the administration and turn it to their own ends, rather than engaging in a self-defeating attempt to smash the entire local state apparatus.

During the ALN conference of October 1955 in the Ouarsenis it was agreed that there were two types of *caid*, those that were recruited from the local *douar* population and who often attempted to protect the peasantry against the colonial administration, and another category that was imposed from outside, as was the generally the case in the Ouarsenis, and who had 'no ties to the local population. They are in general despised and hated.' However, the key organization of colonial control was the fraction chiefs and the forest guards, the latter 'the intelligence agents of the *communes mixtes* are more feared than the *caids* and *bachagas*'.[21] The strategy of the ALN was not to physically eliminate all the *caids* and fraction chiefs but to first sound them out to test how far they would be willing to cooperate or act as informers, while in some cases staying in place providing full access to intelligence from inside the local administration.[22] This was not a totally new strategy since anti-colonial parties like the *Élus*, PCA, and PPA had had a long experience since the 1930s of penetrating the interior through the *djemâas* and the small community of the fraction.

In ALN *mintaqa* 3 the maquis adopted a standard procedure for approaching and organizing a fraction that was as yet unknown to it. A small guerrilla force, working from a list of fraction heads and forest guards supplied by local FLN militants, would approach the target fraction at night and kidnap the *kebir* who would be taken away to an encampment or cave in the nearby forest and subjected to an intense interrogation. The purpose was to extract as much intelligence as possible about the fraction, a knowledge that the *kebir* possessed down to every family and individual, the registers of marriages, births, and deaths that he kept, how much land or property they owned, their level of taxation, whether they owned a gun and had a licence for it, and who was compliant with, or hostile to, the French authorities. The information was later cross-checked with that

[21] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 62–3.

[22] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 62: 'We could not win over the people individually, the only way to turn our *secteur* into a revolutionary body was either by convincing the cadres of the *commune mixte* to work for the FLN, or by destroying them.'

obtained from interrogating the forest guard and from local FLN militants. The maquis, even before a first meeting with the inhabitants, was thus able to construct a detailed socio-political profile of the community, and establish whether the *kebir* had a record of fleecing the inhabitants, or whether he had played an honourable role, for example by dispensing justice in a fair way, evidence used to decide whether he might be left in place under an ALN regime. The *mintaqa* 3 maquis was able to send out numerous teams on any one night to target different fractions and this helps to explain the rapidity of the ALN expansion throughout the mountainous interior.[23]

Madoui's account of ALN penetration into the *douars* is confirmed by a particularly detailed account provided by Mohamed Bentaleb, head of a section in the area of Bou Maad, Zaccar, and El Aneb, who was arrested by the army on 6 November 1956.[24] Bentaleb, a professional soldier who had served in Indochina, and was credited with expertise in guerrilla warfare, described in close detail how he was sent in July 1956 on a mission called 'penetration into the *douars*', to rally the population. Before going into a fraction his section was armed with prior intelligence on the resources and local hostile or friendly attitudes towards Independence. Bentaleb's unit penetrated *mechta* by *mechta* into the *douar* Bou Maad, led by local mountain guides. At each assembly the Political Commissar, Belkebir ('Cauza'), who followed instructions from a printed ALN handbook, *L'Algérie aux hors-la-loi*, placed a particular emphasis on religion, with readings from the Koran, the fight for freedom by Arab states against the infidel, and closed meetings with the sura 'An-Nisa', 'he who dies during combat will go straight to paradise'. The commissars were instructed to tailor their discourse, depending on whether the audience was rural or urban: 'for the uncouth soul of the mountain people it is the Koran that serves as the basis for propaganda, for the townspeople the commentary should follow international affairs, the power of the Arab states, the recent speeches and position of politicians.' The success of such propaganda varied from place to place, with the *douar* Bou Maad proving particularly difficult, while El Aneb, the *douar* that had been successfully politicized by the PCA since the 1940s, was highly receptive. Once the fraction had been securely won over to the FLN, Bentaleb's unit proceeded to set up a local cell that might include the retention of *kebirs*, field guards, and even *caids* who were supportive of the ALN.[25]

[23] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 63–4. Rabah Zerrari ('Si Azzedine'), one of the most gifted and controversial ALN commanders, who joined the maquis in *mintaqa* 2, *wilaya* 4, to the east of the Ouarsenis in February 1955, describes in similar terms the process of night-time operations to take over a fraction; see Commandant Azzedine, *On nous appelait Fellaghas*, reprinted in Jean-Claude Carrière and Commandant Azzedine, *C'était la Guerre. Algérie 1954/1962* (Paris: Plon, 1993), 207–9.

[24] AOM 9140/69, report of RG, Miliana, 7 November 1956, on the interrogation of Bentaleb.

[25] AOM 5Q/130, in a detailed statement 2 November 1957 an ALN militant, Abdelkader Mekki, who had rallied to the SAS of Meurad, gave a similar account of propaganda methods. At a typical village meeting the political commissar Si Zoubir assured the peasants of the strength of the ALN and its support from abroad, and promised a quick victory. 'They would be supplied with arms and the Commissar asked them to support them by giving food and money and not to betray them to the

The next stage of the process was for the ALN, armed with its intelligence, to call all the inhabitants of the fraction to a night-time meeting at the mosque or assembly place of the *djemâa*, to explain the purposes of the liberation struggle. It was a sign of the physical weakness of the poorly armed guerrilla band that it would attempt to impress the peasants by placing in the forefront the best equipped fighters and by various ruses, such as lighting camp fires on mountain crests, to simulate the appearance of a much larger force.[26] It was important to the process of primary contact, and of gaining local trust, that the political commissars or orators that addressed the assembly showed a good informal 'ethnographic' or psychological sense of peasant culture and values, such as respect for the revered elders or *marabouts*. One immediate and obvious challenge was that of language and abstract terms, the difficulty of explaining to isolated communities of largely illiterate people the meaning of revolutionary struggle for independence, and of abstract political terms like 'nation', 'democracy', and 'colonialism'.[27]

The first contact between a guerrilla unit and a fraction community was fraught with difficulty. Isolated mountain *douars*, some of which retained a degree of continuity with their nineteenth-century tribal origins, possessed a strong sense of local identity based on the inward-looking and defensive nature of the fraction, one that was suspicious of any 'outsiders' and often maintained a traditional hostility even to close neighbours. Under these conditions the initial arrival of an ALN unit, composed of men originating in distant towns or regions, and speaking different dialects or languages, could go badly wrong. The potential for ALN units to trample over local customs and sensibilities, provoking a dangerous alienation of the population, arose from a number of factors. The ALN deliberately deployed soldiers (*djounouds*) outside their home *douars*, partly as an act of security so that they would not be recognized and identified by locals informers, and *katibas* were constantly on the move through long-distance circuits. This was also part of a deliberate military strategy to wrench men from their close family and social environment, to break down their intense sense of identity based on small clan or fraction loyalties, and to remould them into truly national units

French'; see also the detailed oral history evidence on such assemblies in Mohamed Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis* (Paris: Fayard, 1993), 147–51; Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955–1962. Reflections on the French-Algerian War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 40–1.

[26] Si Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 169, 208.

[27] L. Bouragaa, *Les hommes de Mokorno*, 19–20, recounts a typical big gathering of a village community that was addressed by the veteran nationalist Si Abdelaziz who explained the long history of 132 years of French conquest and colonization. An old man asked who was this person 'colonialism', and Si Abdelaziz replied, 'The forest guard', the immediate symbol of colonial repression. The elder retorted, 'Where have you been during the last 132 years?'. Bouragaa comments that this peasant did not see the world in terms of ideology and took it for granted that those who symbolized oppression should be resisted and simply wanted to know why the struggle had not begun earlier. R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 34, emphasized the importance of using a form of language that all could understand.

composed of men from all areas of Algeria.[28] What was called 'regionalism', the tendency for militants to form intense ethnic groupings presented a major problem for the FLN, a cause of internal division and localized civil wars that was never fully resolved or eradicated. This meant that on occasion mobile fighting units based, for example, in the Kabyle *wilaya* 3, when moving southwards, as they often did, into the 'Arab' societies of *wilaya* 6 on the northern fringes of the Sahara, could act towards the population more like an occupier than a force for liberation and trigger a bitter local reaction.[29]

Over a period of time the ALN developed a set of orders, backed up by draconian penalties, which regulated in close detail the individual soldier's behaviour in relation to local populations. This could include, for example, not swearing, showing respect to the population, setting an exemplary manner in relation to dress and comportment, abstaining from smoking, and maintaining the most strict discipline in relation to women.[30] The culture of the ALN, the education and training of the rank-and-file, was one that constantly emphasized the patriotic duty of the soldier as a role model, a living example of the future society for which they were fighting.[31]

The most crucial test of the ability of the embryonic ALN to negotiate successfully with mountain populations, to demonstrate an ethnological sensitivity to the mindset of a conservative peasantry, arose in relation to the fundamental issue of religious and customary practices. For the FLN the Algerian War of Independence did not constitute a social revolution, in the sense of a radical transformation of social and cultural values or organization, but rather offered the prime goal of an end to colonial domination.[32] Underlying Messalist and FLN doctrine lay a conservative populism in which the simple act of liberation from colonialism would allow the restoration and flourishing of an integral Arab-Islamic identity. The FLN defined nationalism as quintessentially religious and, in the face of strong regionalism and a weak sense of belonging to such a large and vague entity

[28] Mohammed Harbi and Gilbert Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents et histoire 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 479, proposed regulations for *wilaya* 3, 2 March 1959, stated the need to combat regionalism, 'to suppress the separation into clans', while the formation of ALN units from fighters originating in different *wilayas* 'would strengthen the national conscience and unity'.

[29] G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 204, SHD *1H1649, a report dated 23 January 1959, from a sergeant complaining of the brutal manner of another officer 'E.H.', who had threatened and insulted a local woman who had come to welcome him. She replied, 'Colonialism comes and tortures us during the day. When you arrive that pleases us, but now you also torture us.'

[30] G. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du FLN 1954–1962* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 137, has shown in detail how the formation of the FLN leadership gave rise to a movement that had a tendency 'to treat issues more from a moral than political angle'. On ALN policy towards women, see N. MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, ch. 9, 314–47.

[31] G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 425, SHD 1H1242, circular in *wilaya* 4 (undated): 'The ALN soldier is a special type, he liberates and prepares a happy future for our people.'

[32] Mainstream FLN discourse used the terms 'revolution' and 'socialism', although a socialist ideology or perspective was restricted to a minority of intellectuals who remained politically marginal. On the FLN concept of revolution, see G. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure*, 157–63. On the general absence of ideology and a specific social vision in the FLN, see H. Roberts, 'The FLN', 131.

as 'Algeria', the one thing that served to cement people together into a single, unified movement was the sense of belonging to a shared religion, the universal community of the faithful (*umma*).

As we have seen a key issue confronting both PCA and ALN leaders, many of them educated in the secular and rational culture of the French school, or in the puritanical reformism of the *medersa*, was how to relate to popular Islam or conservative *maraboutism*, the extraordinary mental universe of the peasant, marked by a belief in superstition, the magical powers of shrines, of amulets, of rituals to procure rain, or to protect crops or livestock from disease. The caste of *marabouts* was widely seen by the ALN as a dangerous political force that maintained a false Islam, a kind of opium of the people, that was encouraged by the colonial state as part of a divide-and-rule strategy. The ability of ALN guerrilla forces to successfully insert themselves in, and gain the support of, peasant communities depended significantly on their ability to achieve a balance between respect for custom and the elders, while at the same time promoting a vision of a liberated Algeria based on material progress, education, and a progressive modernity.

We can see these processes at work in the Dahra and Ouarsenis through two incidents that Abderrahmane Krimi and Azzedine recounted to illustrate the process of contact between educated ALN officers and a superstitious peasantry. Krimi recalled how a young and inexperienced ALN leader in the *douar* Beni Haoua had ordered the population to sabotage the aerial cable-car that transported iron ore from the mine at Breira to the coast. However, many locals depended for their wages on the mine and to close operations down would make them unemployed. The ALN was confronted with a total loss of control over the population and Krimi was sent to take over and to resolve what he describes as a virtual 'sedition'.

Krimi, brought up in the neighbouring *douar* of Taourira, had received an intense religious education in the local *medersa* and in Fez, and, as a follower of the *Ulema*, assumed a reformist position in opposition to *maraboutism*. Krimi seized the opportunity of celebrations at the shrine of Sidi Amar to stand before the crowd and the devout elders who were receiving gifts, and electrified them by the traditional greeting, 'Whoever betrays, Sidi Amar will betray in turn!'.[33] The implication was that the saint would wreak revenge on those who opposed him. Krimi then took from his pocket a sum of 50,000 francs that he made as an offering, and announced himself as the son of El-Hadj Ali Krimi, a respected man in the region, one of whose four wives originated from Beni Haoua. Krimi was thus laying claim to direct blood ties to the local community, to the religious

[33] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 69–70.

baraka of his lineage, and, through a big offering, impressed the crowd with the idea that the powerful saint Sidi Amar was on his side.

Immediately, claims Krimi, the crowd embraced him with fervour and the notables of the village sought to outdo each other in providing accommodation for the ALN soldiers. The lessons to be learned from this incident, remarked Krimi, was that ALN officers needed to be wise in their assessment of the situation facing them and of the mentality of the peasantry. He had refrained, although a reformist, from launching a puritanical attack on pagan beliefs, but rather manipulated superstition to achieve his aims. 'In fact it is not easy for the inhabitants of a deprived region, abandoned in the depth of the forest, a prey to hunger and ignorance, to understand a decision, so heavy with consequences, as that taken by the brother *moudjahid* to cut the cable-car wires.' ALN leaders needed always to follow the adage, 'If you are arrogant and hard of heart, the people will flee from you in every direction'.

In his memoirs Rabah Zerrari recounts a similar story but, as a highly secularized Kabyle of urban origin, his account involves a more stereotypical version of the tensions between the revolutionary FLN and a superstitious peasantry. During the early maquis in the region near Palestro, Zerrari and other ALN officers were concerned by the difficulty of politicizing the rural population who were held in the grip of powerful notables and in particular of the *marabouts*. One day some peasants told Zerrari how two men had insulted the *cheikh* Aliouni who then threatened to turn them into stone, which he did. Zerrari seized the opportunity to go with a group of fighters to the *marabout* shrine where he found a typical pilgrimage scene, a crowd with baskets of produce, poultry, cloth, and coins, come to make their offerings.

Zerrari made a speech to the devotees in which he developed the reformist position that no saintly or miraculous intercessor was required between the believer and God. Zerrari challenged the magical powers and authority of the *marabout*, by asking Aliouni why, if he held such supernatural powers, he could not use them to defeat the French. He then ordered his men to destroy the magic charms (*gris-gris*) and drums. A big stock of gifts to the *marabout*, sugar, coffee, oil, semolina, and cloth, was discovered in a cellar and put on public display to show the population how they had been exploited, some of the provisions having turned rotten while their children starved.[34]

The similarity of the two accounts suggests that we are dealing with a standard topos of FLN discourse, but the method of negotiation with the peasant community was in each case rather different.[35] Krimi, a highly religious son of the *bled*,

[34] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 215–16.

[35] A similar account of this kind can be found in L. Bouragaa, *Les hommes de Mokorno*, 75–6. His unit arrived on the night of 16 July 1956 at a shrine in which the saint's tomb was covered with a cloth that the soldiers tore up to bind their sore feet. Their guide and villagers were so furious at the sacrilege that they informed the French, who laid an ambush. The unit escaped, but convinced the inhabitants

was more subtle in his manipulation of peasant belief, one with which he was fully acquainted, while the abrasive, secularized urbanite Zerrari was more inclined to make an aggressive intervention that carried the risk of alienating those who believed that their most sacred values had been trampled underfoot.[36] It was for this reason that Ait Ahmed had suggested in 1948 that the Messalist drive to organize the peasantry should be headed by young militants of rural, rather than of urban, origin.

However, there is a sense in which Krimi and Azzedine were both 'outsiders', not truly in and of the peasant society which was objectified as a naive population that was to be manipulated by revolutionary leaders, rather than by a true dialogue of equals. Zerrari's narrative in particular reads much like one of the standard accounts of European missionaries to Darkest Africa in which the explorer deployed his superior rationality and scientific knowledge to outwit and destroy the claimed magical powers of pagan medicine-men,[37] a position that was surprisingly close to that of the ethnologist Jean Servier, as we will see later.

In the case of Krimi, as for other ALN commanders of rural origin, it would be a mistake to assume that their upbringing among the peasantry led them to simply defend traditional cultural and social practices. The majority of such officers had invariably received a degree of education, and had experience of urban life as labour migrants or in the French army. Many from this background had an ambivalent attitude towards their rural origins, one in which they both extolled the authenticity of peasant life, and at the same time, from a political perspective, knew that an end to the appalling poverty and degradation of the peasant condition could only come about through an end to the domination of conservative élites and a programme of reform based on education. The key objective of the ALN in finding a base in peasant society was not to preserve its structures intact, but to bring about eventual change. How the guerrilla forces attempted to do this is the subject of the next chapter.

that 'The true form of devotion must be shown to the revolution and *djihad* since the enemy has every interest in keeping us in ignorance and showing adoration to things that are as futile as they are useless'.

[36] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 425–6, SHD 1H1242, circular in *wilaya* 4 (*c.*1957–8), noted the need for enlightened leaders who could understand the local situation, 'A gap develops. The separation between the military and the peasant becomes too large. . . . No gulf should exist. It is important to encourage all our brothers, in a normal way and without conflict, that a despicable colonialism keeps in ignorance. *Maraboutism*, for example, must be fought intelligently. It is absurd, even criminal, to shock people.' M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 587–8, another text by Abou Djamal-Eddein from *Renaissance algérienne*, an ALN journal of *wilaya* 3, showed a much more uncompromising reformist condemnation of popular religion and the brotherhoods (*zaouias*), 'veritable agents of Satan'.

[37] This was reinforced in Zerrari's account by his use of the term '*gris-gris*', a word usually associated with the amulets and magical rituals of sub-Saharan Africa that carried a racist connotation of primitive blackness.

15
Creating the FLN Counter-state

For both the ALN and French counterinsurgents, locked into a classic population-centric strategy for 'hearts and minds', a constant concern was how to measure the degree of psychological support each side was receiving, and its change through time. The same question has continued to exercise historians that have, in accordance with their own ideological position, presented the FLN either as an authoritarian organization that was only able to impose itself on the population through terror or, the opposite, a mass movement that mobilized a popular will for national independence. The '*récits de guerre*' of FLN veteran *moudjahidines* invariably depict the *katiba* arriving in a village being warmly received as heroes by a valiant peasantry, while anti-FLN commentators record the very opposite, a cowed and terrorized population that sighed with relief when liberated by advancing French forces.[1]

There can be no ready answer to the question of popular motivation since, as we have argued so far, the situation on the ground at the micro-level was extremely 'messy', and local responses could vary not only from one village to the next, but even within the same family, and from one week to the next. In addition, as some of the most perceptive commentators on life in rural Algeria recorded, like Mouloud Feraoun in his journal, peasant societies had quietly defended themselves since the nineteenth century from the colonial state and its agents, through concealment and '*attentisme*'. The systemic refusal to disclose one's individual or family position in relation to the MNA, FLN, and French forces became even more necessary in war since to do otherwise was to invite violence and even death.

Since, as Stathis Kalyvas argues, the historian or political scientist cannot resolve the issue of motivation, a different approach must be taken. It helps, faced with this conundrum, to leave aside the issue of inner states of mind, an attempt to measure the degree of peasant ideological or political support for 'nationalism' or an FLN programme, to consider the behaviour of the rural population and how it responded to the extreme challenges and life-threatening situations which it confronted. Here it is useful to bear in mind the revisionist

[1] The tone of the official FLN discourse can be gauged from the Soummam Platform of 20 August 1956: the ALN 'benefits enormously from the love of the Algerian people, from its enthusiastic support, from its effective solidarity, both moral, material, total and unshakeable': Yves Courrière, *La guerre d'Algérie*, Vol. 2, *Le temps des léopards* (Paris: Fayard, 1969), app. 1, 657.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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perception that in times of revolt against an occupying oppressor, as during the French Resistance, most citizens did not choose to engage in heroic and dangerous acts of opposition as portrayed in the nationalist myths, but were mainly pre-occupied with personal survival and food procurement, or, in many instances, informing on neighbours.[2] Stathis Kalyvas proposes a model in which population behaviour, and in particular whether individuals chose to inform incumbent or occupying forces, fluctuated in terms of the ebb and flow of which side remained dominant in the locality. This chapter takes this line of enquiry further by considering the ALN not only as a fighting force but also as an embryo counter-state that could offer an alternative governance to that of the colonial regime, an approach that has, until recently, been largely ignored by historians.[3]

One of the outstanding features of the geographical expansion of the FLN into the Chelif region was the extraordinary speed of its advance westward from the Aurès and Kabylia during 1956, its control of the mountainous interior, and the rapidity of the virtual collapse of the CM system. In rapidly displacing the colonial state, the ALN in the Dahra and Ouarsenis found itself in the situation of virtually ruling over tens of thousands of poor peasants and having to regulate everything from the rural economy and food supplies to schooling, welfare, and justice.[4] The rural support of the ALN was to derive not only from its presence as a guerrilla fighting force, but also from its ambition to offer a degree of institutional completeness, an alternative to the colonial state.

The role of the FLN as a quasi-governmental organization developed for several reasons. The ALN strategy was to completely sever the links between the colonial state and the *douars* in order to cripple the entire CM system, so that rural populations would have no further contact with European administrators, justices, schools, policemen, or doctors.[5] Identity cards were destroyed or impounded to prevent travel to the townships in the plain, while any contact with European officialdom was viewed as a form of collaboration and severely punished. Through such a system of radical segregation the ALN could begin to combat the greatest

[2] S. Kalyvas, *The Logic*, 224–32, examines fence-sitting as a defence strategy.

[3] See in particular Ana Arjona Nelson Kasfir, and Zacariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2017). In the Algerian case one exception is Gilbert Meynier, *Histoire intérieure*, 200–8; M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN. Document et histoire*, 187–91, but even here the main angle is a view from above of FLN élites. The idea of an FLN counter-state (or *contre-société*) has been mainly developed in relation to the FLN in metropolitan France; see Benjamin Stora, *Ils venaient d'Algérie. L'immigration algérienne en France 1912–1992* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), ch. 19; N. MacMaster, *Inside the FLN.*

[4] AOM 9140/5, report of Duperré police, 25 January 1957, noted that since July 1956 armed bands had become well installed in the mountains surrounding the town and had 'totally replaced the French administration'.

[5] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 248, 284. An ALN report of December 1956 remarked that the policy was to 'detach the population from the entire French administration. The means to this are classic: the forced resignation of all employees in the administration, destruction of travel permits and a ban on seeking their replacement.'

danger that it faced, the constant flow of intelligence via informers to the gendarmerie, army, and administration.

However, the ALN could not block the access of an extremely poor peasantry to the colonial state apparatus, no matter how inadequate this may have been, without providing some kind of alternative. Moreover, the ALN, in its bid to win the support of the peasantry, the classic battle for hearts and minds, needed to demonstrate that it could support the citizens over whom it was claiming authority as a new state in the making, and relieve them immediately of some of the worst abuses or neglect of the detested colonial system. This was a tall order for a nascent, inexperienced, and poorly equipped guerrilla movement that was constantly under surveillance and attack by the French military, but during 1955 to 1957 the ALN was remarkably successful in constructing the semblance of a counter-state in the interior. The aim of this chapter is to examine how this was achieved in the Chelif region, and to see how it affected the relationship between the guerrilla movement and the rural population.

The standard procedure of the ALN, after gathering intelligence on a particular fraction, was to call the entire population to a night-time meeting at which a guerrilla leader would make a speech explaining the nature of the struggle for national liberation, and would then proceed to set up a new village administrative cell, what the French termed the *Organisation politico-administrative* (OPA) and the ALN the *nizam*. In the early phase of maquis formation the general practice was for the ALN to select the OPA leaders, usually the existing headmen of the fraction or members of the *djemâa* if they were deemed suitable, and sometimes, working alongside them, younger and educated FLN militants from the area. There was a huge advantage in reappointing existing headmen or *djemâa* members who already had an in-depth knowledge of the society, regulated its affairs, and held a moral authority among village kinsmen. Such an apparent continuity of personnel meant that the security services and colonial government, often unaware that *douar* or fraction heads had gone over to the enemy, continued to work with them as agents of the administration, leading to the infiltration or '*noyautage*' of the local government apparatus.[6]

As the ALN gained in experience, the OPA became increasingly refined and was eventually given a standard, bureaucratic structure at the important Soummam conference of August 1956. Soummam, which saw the first top-secret internal gathering of the *wilaya* and FLN leaders from across Algeria, standardized the organizational structures of the ALN-FLN, regulating everything from military ranks and pay to family benefits.[7] The conference inaugurated elected

[6] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 64–5; Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 208–9.

[7] The minutes of the Soummam conference of 20 August 1956, from a 'cleaned-up' version in the journal *El Moujahid*, can be found in Y. Courrière, *Le temps des léopards*, app. 1, 653–85, and R. Madoui, *J'ai été*, app. 2, 335–72. M. Harbi (ed.), *Les archives*, 160–7, and M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 239–62, provide shorter, but more detailed excerpts, from

Assemblés du peuple of five members under a president that, at the level of the *douar* or fraction, would oversee the civil registers, justice, Islamic affairs, finance, the economy, and the police.

Wilaya 4, which included the Ouarsenis *mintaqa* 3, under the leadership of Si M'Hamed, was far more enthusiastic in rapidly implementing the assemblies than other *wilayas* of Algeria.[8] During 1957 ALN reports from different parts of Algeria indicate that the assemblies were proving to be very difficult to set up and sustain, partly because of a lack of literate cadres able to operate the bureaucratic system, and because elections meant that the OPA was far more visible and vulnerable to informers. In May 1957 one region in *wilaya* 5 (Oranie) decided to suspend the assemblies entirely, and this was followed in *wilaya* 4 in September, although the OPA continued in a clandestine form.[9] A French intelligence report of December 1959 concluded that while the OPA appeared to provide a powerful instrument for the domination of the population, in reality, at a time of violent conflict, elected assemblies could not work, and this was why they had had only an ephemeral existence in most parts of Algeria and had been dissolved for security reasons.[10] However, while elections may have ended, this did not mean that the OPA organization had ceased; it had simply gone deeper underground.[11]

The Key Function of the ALN *secteur*: The Example of *kasma* 4311

In order to understand the nature of the relationship between the guerrilla forces of the ALN and the civilian, peasant populations of the mountainous interior, we need to examine the lowest penultimate rung in the pyramidal structure of the FLN organization, that of the *secteur* or *kasma*.[12] Of the four *mintaqa* into which

different sources, and note that the 'official' published versions have been subject to various forms of later amendment.

[8] See R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 96–103, on the rapid implementation of the Soummam policy in the Ouarsenis. On *wilaya* 4 commander Si M'Hamed's keen support for the democratic elections of the people's assemblies in late 1956, compared to *wilaya* 3 (Kabylie) where the Soummam instructions appear not to have been implemented for over a year, see M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 285, 287.

[9] M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 286, order of *mintaqa* 54, 30 May 1957, and of *wilaya* 4, 12 September 1957.

[10] M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 288, SHD 1H1268-1, *instructions pour la pacification en Algérie*, 10 December 1959.

[11] SHD 1H3534, reports on army operations '*Triangle*' and '*Mouflon*', 15–30 May and 18–23 November 1958, located 'very powerful' OPA structures in the Ouarsenis region, and 294 *moussebelines* were identified for the three *douars* of Beni Ouazzan, El Ardjem, and Beni Boukhanous alone, among them the Committee of Five, and an apparatus that included money collectors, guides, field guards, police chiefs, saboteurs, teachers, intelligence agents, judges, and *ravitailleurs*.

[12] After the Soummam conference the FLN-ALN structure descended in six levels: at the top was the periodic *Conseil national de la révolution algérienne* (CNRA) of thirty-four members, and its executive

wilaya 4 was divided, we are here concerned with *mintaqa* or Zone 3, which corresponded to the Ouarsenis, which during 1956 to 1957 was led by the *Chef politico-militaire* (CPM) Si Baghdadi (Ahmed Alili) and three other officers.[13] As we have seen in the previous chapter, we have two important first-hand accounts of operations of *mintaqa* 3, the evidence of Rémy Madoui and Mohamed Teguia, who both served in the Zone and have produced some of the most perceptive accounts of how the ALN, from a weak and inexperienced beginning, developed and refined a peasant-based strategy.[14] *Mintaqa* 3 was subdivided into four *nahia*, one of which, *nahia* 1 (Miliana), was further subdivided into four *kasmas*, of which *kasma* 1, identified by the code 4311, is the focus of attention here.[15]

On 24 September 1957 the Gendarmerie brigade of Lavigerie, a small town in the eastern Chelif valley, captured documents of *kasma* 4311, that provide unusually detailed evidence on the day-to-day relationship between the guerrilla force, the population, and the functioning of a counter-state.[16] *Kasma* 4311 covered an area that corresponded to the three *douars* of Djendel, Ouamri, Bou Hallouan, and part of the *douar* Adélia, and included the four townships of Ain Sultan and Lavigerie in the Chelif valley, the wine-producing village of Borely la Sapie in the hills, and Vesoul Gare, located on the Algiers railway to the north. This was a region which, like Margueritte just to the north-west, was notable for the late and aggressive European expansion of vineyard cultivation into the

the *Comité de coordination et d'exécution* (CCA) based in Algiers, until forced abroad after the 'Battle of Algiers'; below that the Algerian territory was sub-divided into ever smaller areas, first the six *wilaya* (departments), then the *mintaqa* (zones), *nahia* (regions), *kasma* (*secteurs*), and *douars*. See Guy Pervillé, *Atlas de la guerre d'Algérie. De la conquête à l'indépendance* (Paris: Autrement, 2003), 20–5; and G. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure*, 709, for maps and diagrams.

[13] Decision-making was collective, in a council under Si Baghdadi (Captain), assisted by three Lieutenants, the *Chef politique*, Abdellah Ben Mahdjoub, the *Chef militaire*, Djillali Bounaama, and the *Chef des renseignements et liaison*, Mohamed Belkebir.

[14] On Rémy Madoui, see Chapter 14; Mohamed Teguia, *L'armée de libération nationale en wilaya IV* (Algiers: Casbah Editions, 2002). Born in Orleansville 4 May 1927, Teguia emigrated to France after the Second World War, was a postal worker active in the CGT, and returned in 1958 to become head of the *Service de propagande et d'information* in *wilaya* 4. Imprisoned and tortured under Boumediene, he later moved to France where he completed a masters dissertation, *L'armée de libération nationale vue à travers un échantillon*, Paris 8, 1974, and a doctoral thesis in 1976, *L'Algérie en Guerre: 1954–62. Foyers, bases et conduits de la lutte d'Indépendance: d'une étude régionale à une contribution à l'histoire de l'intérieur*, Paris 8, 1976. The thesis was later published, *L'Algérie en Guerre* (Algiers: OPU, 1988), but without the important documents to be found in the appendix to the thesis.

[15] The code 4311 derived from the sequence of the ALN pyramidal organization, with *wilaya* 4 at the top, subdivided into *mintaqa* (3), the *nahia* (1), and the *kasma* (1).

[16] AOM 91/5Q/130. The seven page gendarme report provides a selection (*recueil*) and analysis of key documents that had been seized and relate to the period from April to August 1957. The documents were attributed to 'Si Djaffar' who was later identified by the gendarmerie of Affreville (24 February 1958) as Abdelkader Mahmoudi, aged 21 years, born in Duperré and nephew of the *agha* of Duperré, the *kasma* 1 *Chef des renseignements et liaison*. However, a more likely candidate can be found in AOM 9140/78, a report by the prefect of Orleansville on '*Opération Pilote*', 3 August 1957, which identified 'Djaffar' as the political commissar of Lavarande, Taieb ben Mohamed Khelif, who had been arrested along with forty-one other men during an operation on 18–20 July that had virtually destroyed the OPA.

piedmont, a process of appropriation that remained very much alive in the memory of elders and their militant sons.[17]

Kasma 1, for which no maps have been found, did not correspondent to any colonial administrative unit, but included both part of the rich agricultural plain of the Chelif valley, as well as the isolated mountain range of Bou Hallouan, rising to a thousand metres to the north. This is significant since, ignoring the usual spatial and administrative division between the *commune mixte* and the settler zone of the CPE, it integrated both plain and mountain into a single area, so that the *kasma* leaders could co-ordinate the networks that exchanged food supplies, medicines, money, arms, and personnel between town and countryside. This facilitated ALN operations at the local level by merging urban and rural organization under a single, command structure in which leaders could, for security reasons, rapidly change their location from town to countryside, or vice versa.

In line with the regulations soon to be formalized in the Soummam platform, *secteur* 4311 had a small HQ under the control of a chief master sergeant (*adjudant*), assisted by three master sergeants. This group, that constituted a total of thirty-two fighters (*moujahidine*), had the task of planning military operations, that comprised mainly night-time raids on farms, the burning of barns, destruction of vines and fruit trees, and sawing down of electric posts. But, in addition to military affairs, such as procurement of arms and intelligence, the *secteur* PC also carried out a considerable range of activities in relation to the control and organization of the civilian population. For example, the political commissar travelled out to the four *douars* and twelve fractions to set up the OPA committees, to distribute tracts, and to carry out propaganda work through meetings of all the inhabitants.[18] The vital level of contact with the civilian population was not the *douar*, which covered an extensive area, but the small fraction in which it was possible for the ALN commissars to hold regular meetings of all the inhabitants.[19] In addition *kasma* 4311 carried out a range of tasks, from maintaining civil registers, collecting the FLN tax, and organizing food supplies, to payment of family allowances. The surprising density of the integrated organizational network at the micro-level indicates that the FLN had, at least in this region, established an elaborate administrative apparatus that was parallel to that of the colonial state.[20]

[17] X. Yacono, *Colonisation*, 2.260, the percentage of private land owned by Europeans in the CPE of Ain Sultan increased from 20.3 per cent in 1917 to 53.2 per cent in 1951.

[18] Soummam referred to the task of the political commissars as 'the politicisation of backward regions', in order to achieve, 'the massive support of the peasants'; Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, 660.

[19] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 287, instructions to political commissars in *wilaya* 3, stated their first task in creating the OPA structures was to begin by dividing the *secteur* into fractions.

[20] The Soummam platform stated that the 'the profound disintegration of the French administration has facilitated the birth and development of a duality of power. Already a revolutionary administration is operating via the clandestine *djemâas*'; Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, 659.

One sign of the state-like ambition of the ALN is the fact that in integrating the fraction heads into its structure it simply continued one of the previous functions of the colonial administration which was to maintain the civil registers and periodic census, a key defining function of the modern state. On 6 April 1957, for example, it was recorded that *kasma* 4311 had carried out a census in the fraction of Bocca Reharza of the *douar* Djendel, and registered thirty men, thirty-three women, thirty-five [male?] children, and twenty-six girls. The counting and identification of population was a first necessary step in the creation of a bureaucratic apparatus that could rationally assess the taxation and manpower potential of the area, and its food requirements. Globally *kasma* 4311 had 1,800 militants (*effectifs*), of which 1,112 were tax-payers (*côtisants*).[21]

What is particularly striking about the *kasma* report is the sheer volume and detail of the data collection, as shown, for example, in the precise double-entry financial accounts of income and expenditure, and the monthly census of every soldier, his type of weapon, and wage.[22] It seems anomalous that a clandestine organization like the ALN-FLN should have depended on such a mass of detailed written reports and correspondence that could so easily fall into the hands of the enemy. The reasons for this are various. ALN cadres, even as they sought to displace the colonial state, replicated the bureaucratic culture of the local administration in which many of them had been trained. Secondly, the transmission of orders, correspondence, and reports between the upper and lower echelons of the organization, which was spread over considerable distances inside Algeria, and across the borders into Morocco, Tunisia, Cairo, and elsewhere, for security or technical reasons, could not usually be carried out by telephone or radio.[23] The ALN in the Chelif region, as elsewhere, perfected an extraordinarily effective system of couriers, by which letters and orders could be carried in security through cross-mountain tracks.[24] The ALN-FLN apparatus could not function without the circulation of a mass of paper instructions and this explains in part why it was so keen to recruit hundreds of school students that flooded into the

[21] The figure of 1,800 '*effectifs*' or FLN supporters is not that of the entire population, which was certainly much higher in the four *douars*. If the '*effectifs*' corresponded mainly to adult males, excluding women and children, then the pro-FLN population would have been about 9,000 or about half of the total population of the *kasma*. At the Soummam conference, Ouamrane, as head of *wilaya* 4, reported 40,000 supporters in the department, 2,000 *moussebilines*, and 1,000 *moudjahidines*: M. Harbi (ed.), *Archives*, 162.

[22] The FLN Fédération de France maintained a similar bureaucratic apparatus in metropolitan France, as can be seen from the mass of internal documents captured by the police: see Neil MacMaster, *Inside the FLN: The Paris Massacre and the French Intelligence Service* (2013), online at UEA Digital Repository <https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk>. The *secteur* 4311 report indicates that, as in France, 'Djaffar' made his monthly reports following a standard FLN format.

[23] The FLN did develop or acquire quite sophisticated radio transmission systems, but they were few in number, restricted to higher level commanders, and often proved fatal through the ability of the French to track transmitters through triangulation.

[24] The *kasma* 4311 report records incoming and outgoing correspondence.

maquis during 1956.[25] One of the main reasons why the OPA system ran into difficulty in late 1957 was because of the severity of the French repression that led to the arrest of many key cadres and the difficulty of finding educated, literate replacements.

The next part of this chapter examines in more detail the functions of the OPA and the ALN counter-state in negotiating the relationship between the maquisards and the rural population in the areas of food supply, taxation, land reform, welfare, justice, education, and the recruitment of auxiliaries (*moussebilines*). Peasant support for the liberation struggle, or its opposite the colonial state, was not simply determined by ideology or a deep nationalist conviction to cast off the oppressor, but was also grounded in the extent to which the ALN could offer the rural population a degree of material assistance in the face of poverty and a violent and insecure environment.

The Question of Food Supplies in the Mountains

The standard discourse of the '*récits de guerre*' by FLN veterans invariably describe how hungry guerrilla units arrived at a farmhouse or village to be always welcomed and fed by peasants that, despite their poverty, placed every item of their meagre food reserves on the table. The Maoist image of the guerrilla as a fish in water has also reinforced standard COIN perceptions of maquisards receiving their basic supplies from the peasant economy. But this was far from being the case and the ALN was aware from an early stage of maquis formation that the peasant economy simply could not sustain the presence of a permanent armed force and that it was political suicide to try, at least on an extended basis, to force farmers to supply food.[26]

The maquis adressed the issue of food, always a burning problem in mountain societies that faced periodic famine, in a number of ways. An early phase of maquis preparation for both the FLN and PCA consisted in the construction of underground stores or caches that were strategically placed so that ALN units, often having to engage in long, night-time forced marches, were able to travel light and locate their food supplies at destination.[27] As a guideline the ALN liked to

[25] Rémy Madoui is typical of this generation of urban youths who 'went up' into the hills. Madoui, aged only 15 at the time, was lycée-educated, had a knowledge of colonial administration through his father, a CM official, and was promoted by the ALN in February 1956 to head the bureaucracy in the HQ of the Teniet el Haad region.

[26] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 206: 'The people are generous but unfortunately their means of existence are limited. . . . The ALN never wanted to be a burden for the people with whom they live in symbiosis.' M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 171, instructions of a political commissar in Kabylie, *c.*1957, ordered ALN units not to stay in one village for more than two days.

[27] The tradition of storing grain in underground silos, *matmores*, both for security reasons and to conceal grain from the taxman, was intact and this meant that peasants, the masters of concealment, assisted the ALN in this task.

have at least two months of reserves in hand, and the stocking up became especially crucial in the autumn as the guerrillas prepared to install themselves in caves for the winter, a period during which heavy snow and rain made military operations impossible for both French and Algerian forces.[28]

To some extent the guerrillas were therefore partially independent from the peasantry in terms of provisions, and this pattern was reinforced by the ALN using money or credit to pay peasants for any supplies they provided and to acquire stocks through commercial markets in the neighbouring towns.[29] The maquis organized regular mule-trains to descend to the centres and markets where, despite French attempts to police sales of grain, medicine, radio batteries, and tinned food, and to starve out the inhabitants of the *zones interdites*, the peasants were skilled in avoiding detection or joining up with the FLN urban cells that specialized in clandestine supply networks for the maquis.[30] On 13 August 1957, for example, *kasma* 4311 reported the departure of six men with a 'caravan' of five mules to transport supplies from another ALN region. In the townships of Lavigerie and Borély la Sapie there were specialized cells that organized medical supplies. Gendarmes and army reports in the archives often refer to the interception of mule trains.[31] Often the authorities, under the special powers act of March 1956, ordered the closure of local markets in a bid to cut off supplies to the *zone interdite*.[32]

Since the FLN collected taxes on a sliding scale, according to individual wealth or income, it was able to raise far more money per capita in the towns than in the

[28] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 307, text of an order, *wilaya* 4, *mintaqa* 3, 19 June 1960, for each region (*nahia*) to ensure during the harvest the creation of stocks consisting of 5,000 quintals of wheat, 4,000 quintals of barley, 200 of lentils, and 100 of chickpeas.

[29] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 206, ALN regulations obliged combat units, 'to pay the peasants for the food and clothing provided to them'.

[30] AOM 9140/132 on the regulation of 12 August 1957 that controlled movement of goods through a system by which shop owners and wholesale companies were required to get a certificate (*titre de mouvement*) from the local administration or SAS, declaring the quantity of materials being transported from one place to another. See Chapter 18 on how Louis Kergoat and the worker-priests high in the Djebel Bissa managed to smuggle supplies and avoided the SAS controls by liaison with Algerian *commerçants* of Francis Garnier who were almost all FLN supporters.

[31] See AOM 4i206, RG report, 12 March 1958, on a supply convoy of thirty men that had transported sugar, coffee, tea, and other foodstuffs from a secret cache that had been supplied by a trader based in Molière. More generally on the supply system in the Ouarsenis, see M. Teguia, *L'armée de libération*, 81–3.

[32] AOM 4SAS95, order of 26 June 1957 which banned all '*souks et marchés*' in the *douar* Zouggara until further order; AOM SAS105, order of Lt-Colonel Dussel, 12 August 1959, banning sale of all tinned goods in the markets of Bou Rached, Rouiba, Attafs, and Zeddine. On 5 February 1957 a formal complaint was lodged with the SAS that a group of men returning from market to the *douar* of Bou Rached had been straffed by an aeroplane, killing two men, and wounding two others, one of them aged 12 years. S. Dalila Ait-El-Djoudi, *La guerre d'Algérie vue par l'ALN 1954–1962. L'armée française sous le regard des combattants algériens* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2007), 134, an FLN leaflet stated, 'In Kabylie, famine is systematically organized by the SAS officers'. There are indications that the French army imposed blockades to starve out the recalcitrant populations of the *zones interdites*, as they had done with the tribes of the Moroccan Atlas during the 1930s.

countryside from a relatively well-to-do bourgeoisie, as well as to extort money from both the Algerian and European urban élites. This capital was then used to finance the maquis supplies, and to some extent represented a transfer of global wealth from the urban to the mountain economies. To a significant extent the FLN-ALN was able to develop a parallel economy that reached from urban *commerçants*, with access to normal banking and credit facilities, into the countryside.[33]

The dependency of the maquis in the Chelif on urban supplies and credit became evident in the summer of 1957 from a number of intercepted ALN documents. Si Amar, quartermaster for *kasma* 4232 near Cherchell, wrote to his superiors in May 1957:

> We are suffering hugely from a lack of money.... The dealers that have supplied our merchandise on credit suffer greatly and do not hesitate to send us their bill from time to time. They have asked us to advance half, which we have been unable to do.... That's why we request effective assistance from the region, in order to pay our debt that has risen to 800,000 francs.[34]

In the later stages of the war considerable sums of money raised by the FLN in France from among industrial workers and businessmen were finding their way through the international banking system directly into *wilaya* 4.[35] This enabled the guerrilla forces to avoid making huge supply demands on a hard-pressed peasantry and, to a certain extent, to make a net contribution to the rural economy.

A further way in which the ALN was able to increase its food supply, while also assisting the peasantry, was through a wartime booty economy that represented a continuity with age-old traditions of banditry. When the ALN sent night-time raiding parties into the plain to attack *colon* farms, destroying vines, orchards, and barns, they also used the opportunity to remove any portable food reserves, which usually meant livestock that could be driven away on the hoof.[36] During the night of 18 January 1957, for example, an ALN band raided the farm of Georges Petit a

[33] On FLN finances in *wilaya* 3, see Settar Ouatmani, 'L'histoire de la wilaya III à travers ses archives. Un example: le service financier', in Aissa Kadri, Moula Bouaziz, and Tremor Quemeneur (eds), *La guerre d'Algérie revisitée. Nouvelles génération, nouveaux regards* (Paris: Karthala, 2015), 165–77.

[34] SHD 1H3530, three letters to Si Abbès, quartermaster of *kasma* 4311, July 1957, noted that a lack of credit meant a shortage of medicines, without which 'the patients will die.... Excuse me for saying this but we have no money left.... a company below (at Haraouat) is starving to death.'

[35] N. MacMaster, *Inside the FLN*.

[36] AOM 4SAS105, letter from Missoum Ezziane, farmer in the *douar* Zeddine, 16 April 1957, to SAS at Duperré, a band of forty men occupied his farm and took twenty-five sheep, a calf, and 35 quintals of barley and wheat from a silo.

mile to the east of Duperré and, after setting fire to the buildings, drove off 200 goats, 150 sheep, and ten cattle.[37]

Livestock was being driven into farms in the mountains on a ranching scale. General de Brebisson reported to the prefect of Orleansville that cattle raiding was so organized that livestock was being transferred by lorry across the region and centralized in certain mountain locations, as in the Djebel Doui where flocks of two thousand animals had been seen by spotter planes.[38]

This, an expansion of the traditional form of banditry known as the *bechara*, meant that the ALN could accumulate large stocks of sheep, goat, and cattle, a meat supply that was also used to feed the mountain population.[39] Azzedine claimed that *colons* livestock was slaughtered whenever a large fighting unit, like the hundred-man *katiba*, passed through the area, while every month fresh or sun-dried or salted meat (*kheligh*) was distributed to the population.[40] In time the ALN was able to develop an extensive inter-*wilaya* trading system by which regions exchanged specialized or surplus goods like grain, olive oil, and semolina.[41]

Even more remarkable was the fact that the ALN, where possible, also sought to develop the agro-pastoral economy of the mountains through assisting directly in farming and initiating, no matter how fragile, an agrarian reform. For rural society the great dream of anti-colonial liberation that had remained central to the popular culture of resistance since the nineteenth century, was to regain the land that had been occupied by the French.[42] During late 1956 and 1957 as the ALN rapidly seized control over large swathes of the Ouarsenis and Dahra mountains, the maquis was in a position where it could immediately act to facilitate peasant access to land and forest.

[37] AOM 9140/5, Duperré police report to sub-prefect, Miliana, 20 January 1957. A subsequent report of the gendarmerie of Duperré, 9 September 1957, AOM 91/5Q/130, noted that Petit, and another *colon* Charles Giroud, were not only making payments to the FLN, but had asked that their farms be burned, presumably to conceal their compliance with the FLN and/or to claim insurance on farms they could not sell.

[38] AOM 9140/75, de Brebisson to prefect, 19 February 1957. G. Elgey, *Histoire. La fin*, 3.131, by 1 September 1956 farmers had lost 31,642 killed or stolen livestock.

[39] On the *bechara*, see Chapter 2, p. 47. The report for *kasma* 4311 recorded for 6 June 1957 that an informer had passed information to the authorities on a farmer A. ben Zorha who was keeping, 'all the livestock of the *mougahidines* [sic] who are in the mountains (*djebel*)'.

[40] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 210.

[41] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 209: 'All these exchanges were entered into the accounts: a tube of toothpaste or soap against a wireless receiver or a ton of semolina.'

[42] This is the central thesis of Mostefa Lacheraf's influential, *L'algérie: nation et société*. The Soummam Platform noted, 'the massive support of the peasants for the FLN for whom the winning of national independence means, at the same time, an agrarian reform'; Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, 660. M. Launay, *Paysans*, 392, FLN supporters made clear to Launay that the primary reason why they supported the Liberation struggle was to gain possession of the land. One militant even stated boldly, 'Independence: we couldn't give a damn'; what they dreamed of was 15 hectares, just enough to be comfortable and independent.

While historians have examined post-Independence agrarian reform, they have failed to look at the question of ALN policy towards peasant land access during the war itself in the vast regions that it controlled in the mountains. From most accounts of the ALN it would appear that guerrilla forces were constantly on the move, and that they were never in a position to develop the scale of stable, liberated zones like those achieved by the Chinese communists or the Vietminh in Indochina, in which geo-political factors enabled the creation of total state economies of millions of people, complete with an industrial base and monetary system.[43] However, during 1956 and 1957, the peak of ALN control of the mountain regions, the maquis did dominate quite large and secure 'fortress' zones in which the first steps could be taken in order to create a full range of institutions, from medical centres and schools to small cooperatives, police forces, and courts. In the central Ouarsenis and Dahra in which the ALN maquis was embedded, the historic European occupation of arable land was quite limited and, as we have seen, the main grievance of the peasants came rather from the seizure of vast tracts of forest and scrubland by the state or mining companies and the draconian forest legislation that excluded them from grazing, woodcutting, and land clearance.

When the ALN established the new OPA structures, they tended to keep not only sympathetic fraction chiefs in place, but also cooperative forest guards.[44] The FLN-ALN, regarding itself as the successor to the colonial state, laid claim to the control of all domains and communal lands, so that anybody who cultivated state lands without permission could in principle be fined. However, the ALN appears to have removed the detested, and oppressive system of forest regulation, and to have opened the way for peasant 'invasion' of the forests that would have relieved the intense demographic pressure on resources, while creating strong support for the maquis.[45] In the western Dahra (Oranie), however, the ALN imposed fines for cutting wood close to any track, since this removed cover for ambushes.[46]

[43] On the liberated guerrilla zones and economies of Asia, see Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam. Un état né de la guerre 1945–1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); Neil MacMaster, 'Constitution d'une base paysanne: comparaison des guérillas au Vietnam et en Algérie, entre 1940 et 1962', in Christopher Goscha and Sylvie Thenault (eds), *Maghreb-Indochine comparaisons impériales*, *Monde(s): histoire éspaces relations* 12 (2017), 121–40.

[44] See R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 64–5, on the key role given to the field guards in the new OPA system; L. Kergoat, *Frères contemplatives*, 46–7, notes that the forest guards were evacuated from the Djebel Bissa and their fortified forest houses were burned down.

[45] M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 625, legal regulations for *wilaya* 1, *mintaqa* 1, 17 November 1957. The juridical position of the FLN appears to have been to lay claim to all property held by the colonial state, and to freeze all claims as to ownership and distribution, until the Liberation. In the meantime any grant by the ALN of land access was 'provisional'. It seems likely that the FLN wished to prevent or contain the potentially explosive issue of Algerian land claims or repossession during the war itself. M. Harbi and G. Meynier, *Le FLN documents*, 621, in *wilaya* 2 the FLN *Commission de conciliation*, 27 October 1956, was barred from examining matters relating to land, olive trees, and fixed property.

[46] SHD 1H2536/1, *Opération Pilote*, 'Monographie des sous-secteurs de Mostaganem et du Dahra', the ALN imposed fines of 5,000–10,000 fr for cutting wood near tracks. In 2014 large swathes of tree

ALN officers did, however, engage in localized agrarian reform. In the Djebel Bissa, Louis Kergoat recounts how he did not catch sight of his first ALN soldier until November 1956 but as soon as the guerrilla began to form a 'free zone' they set about initiating what Kergoat describes as an agricultural 'micro-reform', which sought to redistribute landownership in order to give more to the poorest peasants. The task was in the hands of the new *djemâa*/OPA and worried farmers were coming to Kergoat to ask him to translate their notarial acts and cadastral maps.[47] While such redistribution may have increased support for the ALN among the majority of the poor, it was perhaps equally likely to arouse hostility among the slightly better-off, and most influential families, or to stir up the inter-clan feuding that was endemic in mountain society.[48]

There were various ways in which ALN officers directly encouraged or participated in agricultural production in order to supply their own needs, as well as that of the peasantry. Much of this endeavour seems to have taken the form of joint army-civilian farming, the forms of collective labour known as the *twiza*, and Azzedine recounts how, to avoid French attacks, 'At night the peasants worked, sowed and harvested under the protection of the ALN'. In the deepest parts of the Ouarsenis there flourished a form of market-gardening, known as the 'ALN gardens', in which lettuces, lentils, chick peas, and fruit were produced. Such experiments in cooperative farming were first pioneered in the Djebel Louh in the Ouarsenis, and soon spread elsewhere under the management of the popular assemblies.[49] In many *douars* of the Chelif region the very poorest peasants were *khammès*, locked into a contract system that had provided them with only a fifth share of produce under the colonial regime. The ALN was able to support a more progressive system ('*chourka bénès*') through which property owner and farmer shared equal parts of the production.[50]

stumps, visible alongside roads outside Chlef (Orleansville), gave testament to recent state security measures to combat Islamist attacks during the black decade.

[47] Louis Kergoat, *Frères contemplatifs en zone de combats. Algérie—1954–1962 (wilaya IV)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 69–70, 166–71. Kergoat ('Brother Said') wrote to his superior René Voillaume on 25 and 26 November to express his concern that assisting the *djemâa* in this way was a political act that they should avoid. Voillaume replied from Lyon on 4 December to say that such assistance with documents was perfectly acceptable.

[48] L. Kergoat, *Frères contemplatifs*, 153, in a letter of late September 1956 remarked that things were quiet in the area, 'at least on the political level, but as to murders and theft between families, that continues just as badly as before'.

[49] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 323–4.

[50] See the Soummam Platform, Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, 672; and L. Kergoat, *Frères contemplatifs*, 168, on the so-called '*nouç-nouç*' joint sharing system that was applied in the Djebel Bissa. L. Bouragaa, *Les hommes*, 41; the ALN in the Ouarsenis encouraged co-operatives, invested in the system of joint production, and stocked grain in silos (*matmores*), reserves that were for both fighters and the civilian population. J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 53, notes that the more equitable form of sharecropping ('*bènnos*') was dominant by 1964. Georgette Elgey, *Histoire de la IVe République. La fin. La république des tourmentes (1954–1959)* (Paris: Fayard, 2008) 3.290–1, notes a government decree of 26 March 1956 on a *réforme agraire* also introduced the half-share *khammesat*. This is typical of a situation in which colonial

To conclude, in the area of food supply and the ever-lasting battle for subsistence that lay at the heart of peasant existence, it can be seen that the ALN was not positioned as an alien occupier or drain on scarce resources but rather as a force that often attempted to contribute, as far as it was able in the circumstances, to the well-being of the mountain population. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the success of the ALN in being able to effect a significant agrarian reform, especially as French military pressure after 1957 began to destroy or disrupt the stable 'free zones' of the interior through forced population displacement (*regroupement*) and aggressive destructive operations into the guerrilla areas, declared to be free-fire *zones interdites*.

However, the ALN policy on food acquisition and supply did play a significant part in winning over the peasantry. Moreover, the ALN was not a military organization that remained separate from civilian society, but was deeply embedded within the local population, sharing on a daily basis, and often over long periods of time, in the communal activities of field labour, shared meals, and evening story-telling and song. The web of quotidian contact and exchange was rich and diverse: for example, the ALN was always in need of transport livestock, especially mules, to carry heavy supplies, but this created a shortage of draught animals, especially at times of ploughing and heavy harvest work. The guerrilla and local farmers had to constantly negotiate the sharing of resources. 'The beasts of burden used in the convoys', noted Mohamed Teguia, 'were supplied by the farm houses (*dechras*) and had to be returned there by the end of the same day'.[51] Rural populations and guerrilla combatants were bound by a web of reciprocal obligations, and for the peasantry there was a sense in which the trite phrase, 'the *moudjahidines* are one of us', held true in a way that would never apply to the French soldiers.

Taxation and the Maquis Welfare State

The rapid expansion of the ALN maquis in the mountains meant that it became virtually impossible for the colonial administration to continue some of the functions most hated by the population, particularly military conscription and taxation. The ALN was, in theory, in a good position to gain popular support in the countryside by simply eliminating the detested taxman and his agents. However, there was a trade-off since the guerrillas imposed their own levy ('*collecte*'), and the question can be asked whether, on balance, the ALN taxes

welfare reform, especially by the SAS, mirrored that of the ALN, or vice versa, and it is often difficult to untangle which side first initiated certain measures or who was copying whom.

[51] M. Teguia, *L'armée de libération*, 83.

were less burdensome than the colonial, and whether more of this revenue was spent to the advantage of the local population, rather than syphoned off by the *colons*-dominated municipality and central government. In the absence of research on post-war taxation of rural society the question is not one that can be easily answered, but we can throw some light on the redistributive functions of the ALN counter-state.[52]

Azzedine remarks that the creation of a financial war chest was one of the main goals of the embryo maquis, along with the location of arms.[53] The ALN imposed a tax that was generally set at one-tenth of income, corresponding to the Muslim religious obligation of the *zekkat*, which in principle was a form of almsgiving for the needy. But in reality the ALN created a standard, incremental table of charges that appears to have been close to the existing colonial taxation system, one that was based on the estimated global wealth and income of each family, the area of arable land owned, the total cereal production in a particular year, the number of livestock, income from commerce, and other factors. To make such calculations, especially in the unstable conditions of war, was an almost impossible task for guerrilla fighters, and this explains why they were so dependent on the collaboration of fraction chiefs who had for decades supervised the colonial taxation system at the local level.[54] Rémy Madoui explains how in creating the new ALN village administration (OPA) the fraction chief was simply told to halt all tax collections for the colonial state, and to divert it towards the maquis through a charge of 10 per cent on the better-off landowners, and 5 per cent on the rest.[55] Azzedine estimated the average payment at 200 francs a month, which was about a tenth of the income of an agricultural worker in the Chelif region, a small but not inconsiderable sum.[56]

[52] More is known about colonial taxation for the period before 1918; see C.-R. Ageron, *Les algériens musulmans*, 1.249–65, 2.707–36; and for the inter-war period, 'Les paysans algériens du Constantinois devant la fiscalité et la crise économique (1920–1935)', in C.-R. Ageron, *Politiques coloniales*, 231–48. J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 173, during a meeting with the peasants of Bou Maad region in early 1957, one elder remarked: 'Those pigs [FLN] are worse than the French, if we let them do as they like they will take even more money than the tax collector.'

[53] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 205.

[54] J.-P. Charnay, *Vie musulmane*, 234, on the role of the *kebirs* in co-ordinating tax-returns from the fraction. J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 83, made reference to this continuity between former *caids* or *marabouts*, now integrated as FLN cadres, and the rebels to suggest that the peasants continued to be exploited in the same way: 'For them [the peasants], the serfs, nothing had changed. They had to continue paying.'

[55] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 64.

[56] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 209. AOM 1Y113, PAC report, 9 August 1946, estimated the annual income of a poor agricultural worker, employed for 300 days a year at 65 fr per day (19,500 fr), plus income from a garden plot (5,500 fr), at a total 25,000 fr, for a family of six. Precise estimates of annual peasant income are almost impossible to arrive at, since hill farmers suffered from massive under-employment, and had a variable range of resources, from cereals and fruit, to public works relief (road mending), seasonal migration, war pensions, and small market sales. The most detailed picture of peasant budgets in the Ouarsenis is provided by Jacques Lizot, *Metidja*, 61–7, 135–43.

The documents for *kasma* 4311 intercepted in September 1957 provide detailed financial accounts that indicate that 1,781 inhabitants (heads of household) were levied and in one month paid an average of 300 francs per family. The four *douars* of the sector, however, covered a diverse geography, that included part of the rich agricultural plain of the Chelif, small townships, and a large mountainous area of the Dahra. This was reflected in what amounted to a form of graduated income tax in which better-off urban shop-keepers, artisans, and civil servants paid up to 5,000 to 6,000 francs per month, while the great mass of the poor (75 per cent of the total), including most of the peasantry, paid under 300 francs, or were simply too impoverished to make any contribution (Table 4).[57]

However, the revenue-raising capacity of the ALN in *kasma* 4311 was more than double the income from taxes, due to additional fines and what were referred to as 'gifts'.[58]

Gifts, or 'voluntary donations', often demanded to mark a particularly important nationalist anniversary or other occasion, were not always freely given, and the FLN collectors systematically extorted very large sums of money from more wealthy Algerians, often those that had had a long track record of close collaboration with the colonial regime, as well as from *colons*.[59] ALN night-time attacks on the farms of the Chelif plain, part of a strategy to cripple the agrarian economy through damage to property, were so frequent, and the insurance costs so high, that eventually untold numbers of both Algerian and European farmers agreed to

Table 4 Monthly tax collection in *kasma* 4311 (1957). Source AOM 5Q/130.

Amount of tax (old francs)	Number of contributors	Total raised
5,000 to 6,000	15	87,000
1,000 to 2,500	106	108,500
400 to 600	306	156,800
100 to 300	656	177,750
Zero rated	688	0
Total	1,781	530,050

[57] The standard FLN tax rate in metropolitan France on Algerian factory workers was ten times higher, at 3,000 to 3,500 francs.

[58] A final monthly account in the 4311 document records tax payments (551,550), late dues (265,150), gifts (304,400), fines (109,000), making a total income of 1,230,100. This is similar to the 1,046,800 francs income in October 1957 of *kasma* 3 just to the north in the Cherchell region: SHD 1H3530/6.

[59] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 625, legal regulations of *wilaya* 1, *mintaqa* 1: 'A refusal to pay the tax or gift will be considered an act of treason.'

reach a secret agreement with the guerrillas in what amounted to a protection racket.[60]

An extraordinary intelligence report from a parachute brigade in Orleansville, based on the interrogation of an FLN militant Bougharab Sahraoui ('Ouazani') in July 1957, contains a wealth of detail on FLN negotiations during late 1956 and early 1957 with the leading economic and political élite of the city, including the aristocratic Bouthiba and Saiah families, and the mayor Bisgambiglia, for large, lump sum payments. In all a total of eleven individuals or interest groups, both Algerian, European, and Jewish, negotiated to pay 44,700,000 francs.[61] Although the source, almost certainly obtained under duress, must be treated with caution, the detail appears authentic.[62] Such forced contributions from the wealthy farming and business community, along with the higher level of regular monthly taxation collected from the pro-FLN urban middle class, greatly expanded the revenues of the movement, much of which was spent on buying food, weapons, and materials that were channelled into the maquis.

In a global sense the ALN-FLN organization was able to reverse the normal situation in the colonial economy in which taxes and resources flowed from the impoverished masses of the mountain down to the plain, and to transfer wealth from the urban to the rural sector.

How much of the global revenues of the ALN maquis reached the peasantry itself? The Soummam Platform stated the general aim of the struggle for independence was to support in particular, 'the most numerous social groups, the poorest, the most revolutionary, the peasants and agricultural workers'.[63] The FLN-ALN, although not subscribing to the class-conflict theories of Marxism, was certainly inspired by a strong sense of redistributive justice, and the graduated taxation system ensured that the better-off paid far more, which was then channelled through to the impoverished. As Azzedine remarked, this progressive system operated not only within the fraction, but also between villages in richer and poorer agrarian zones, a kind of minimum wage policy (SMIG).[64] The colonial state had failed to extend the system of family benefits, which was universal in metropolitan France and among urban industrial workers in

[60] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 222, notes that not all properties were attacked: for example, at Ain Bessam a *colon* provided the ALN with intelligence and also paid a regular tax. Protection money was a far more rational policy for the ALN since continuous destruction of the local economy deeply impacted on rural employment and threatened to alienate agricultural workers from the nationalists, and also to reduce the FLN's own tax-raising capacity. AOM 12CAB37, GG monthly report on the CM for January 1957, noted that many *colons* were paying the FLN, and one overt sign of this was the return to work of agricultural workers who had initially withdrawn their labour under pressure from the FLN.

[61] AOM 91/1K1186, *bulletin de renseignements*, O.R. [*officier de renseignements*], *11e Demi Brigade Parachutiste de Choc*, signed Lt-Colonel Decourse, 3 July 1957.

[62] See, for example, the detail on the negotiation made by the FLN *collecteur* Laid Baghdali, a grocer in the Bocca Sahnoun shanty town, with Azoulay Junior, so that the latter received permission to open a shop on payment of 2 million francs.

[63] Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, 669–70.

[64] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 209–10.

Algeria, to the peasantry, but this was now achieved, although rural rates were much lower than for the towns.[65] Crucial to the morale of the fighting force was the fact that a pension was paid to the family of any soldier or militant who was held prisoner or who had died a 'martyr' (*chouhada*). In the financial accounts of *kasma* 4311, in a budget spend of 694,000, some 364,000 or over 52 per cent, went towards civilian welfare, more than on military expenditure.[66]

In addition to this, the regular scale of pay established at Soummam for each military grade represented a singular contribution to the rural economy. The military accounts for sector 4311 (July 1957) show that each of the thirty-two soldiers was paid monthly between 1,000 and 5,500 francs, although the majority were on pay of 3,000 fr (thirteen men) and 4,000 fr (twelve men).[67] This meant that each *moujahidine*, on average, received an annual wage of 37,032 francs, which was distinctly more than the 25,000 francs average earned by agricultural labourers in the Chelif. This was still a very low level of income, and the mortality rate among combatants was catastrophic, but such a regular form of cash income, along with the security offered by the guarantee of widow and family pensions, must have been quite attractive to the young, unemployed peasants massed in the mountainous interior.[68] Historians have often argued that desperately poor peasants were drawn into the French auxiliary forces (*harkis*), not because they supported *Algérie française*, but because of the endemic poverty faced by their families, but few have asked the question of whether the same processes may have been at work in relation to the ALN.[69]

Schools, Health Care, and the System of Justice

In order to gain institutional completeness as a counter-state there were a range of other social and welfare functions than the ALN adopted, which are treated briefly here. In order to segregate mountain populations from French influence, the ALN frequently destroyed or forced the closure of state schools but, at the same time, was able to expand the rural Koranic schools that had previously been suppressed

[65] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 242, the Soummam Platform set family benefits so that each *moudjahidine* received 5,000 fr (urban) or 2,000 (rural), and another 2,000 fr per additional person.

[66] The FLN family benefit system was an extension of practices of the Messalist movement: AOM 91/5Q/138, Orleansville RG, 17 November 1955, contains documents on payments to MNA militants, including backdated payment of 15,000 to the family of Djilali Bounaama, while in prison. Bounaama was later to become ALN commander of *wilaya* 4.

[67] The average army wage in *secteur* 4311 was 3,086 fr per month. The pay levels seem to be higher than the official table set down in the Soummam Platform; see M. Harbi, *Archives*, 164, although within the range from minimum (1,000) to a maximum 5,000 (colonel).

[68] D. Ait-El-Djoudi, *La guerre d'Algérie vue par l'ALN*, 97, notes some men joined the maquis attracted by the family allowance.

[69] M. Hamoumou, *Et ils sont*, 189–97.

or had functioned in a covert way. In the report for *kasma* 4311, for example, there is mention of the *commission culturelle* that received 100,000 fr in the monthly budget and was operating thirty schools. There is little information about the schools, but certainly the ALN would have taken care to see that only nationalist teachers were employed and that children would have received education in the history and culture of the Algerian people.[70] Mohamed Bentaleb, the *secteur* commander in the Bou Maad, El Aneb region, told his French interrogators that each *douar* was ordered to set up a Koranic school that was to be obligatory for children aged under 12 years, and these were taught by 'teachers (*tolbas*) from the *medersas* of Morocco (Meknés), Tunisia (Zitouna), and Algeria (Ben Badis) or the Franco-Muslim lycées'.[71]

A second, and key, area of the relationship between fighting units and the local peasantry concerned the vital question of gender, the supportive role of women, and the sensitive mine-field of the regulation of sexual relations and issues of honour in conservative rural societies that practised high levels of gender segregation.[72] Young educated Algerian women from an urban background, like the sisters Meriem and Lalia Beidj and Hassiba Benbouali, all three from Orleansville, went into the maquis to serve as nurses in ALN clandestine hospitals.[73] Although the women had to work in the most difficult conditions, often with a lack of even basic medicines, they did everything possible to provide medical assistance not only to soldiers but also to the local population, and gave peasant women advice on childcare issues while seizing the opportunity to explain the political aims of the revolution.[74]

The presence of young, urban women, who challenged the strict gender regulation of rural society, astonished and shocked conservative peasants, but guerrilla commanders, who tended to share the patriarchal values of Algerian society, imposed draconian moral and segregative regulations on their units.[75] Although

[70] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 637–47, on ALN and education; among the documents is a curriculum for a school in *wilaya* 3 (1957), with emphasis on the Koran, reading, writing (dictation), mathematics, manual work, and singing.

[71] AOM 9140/69, report of RG, Miliana, 7 November 1956, on interrogation of Bentaleb.

[72] There is a substantial body of research on the role of women in the maquis; see Djamila Amrane, who herself fought with the ALN, *Les femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (Paris: Plon, 1991); Diane Sambron, *Femmes musulmanes. Guerre d'Algérie 1954–1962* (Paris: Autrement, 2007); Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters. Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Ryme Seferdjeli, '"Fight with Us, Women, and We Will Emancipate You": France, the FLN and the Struggle over Women in the Algerian War of National Liberation, 1954–1962', Ph.d., London School of Economics, 2004.

[73] On Hassiba Ben Bouali (born January 1938), Meriem Beidj (born 7 May 1933), and Lalia Beidj (born 7 October 1935), who all died in the maquis, as well as other *moudjahidate* of *wilaya* 4 and the Chelif region; see M. C. Ould El Hocine, *De la résistance*, 130, 163–4, 211–13.

[74] N. MacMaster, *Burning*, 322–6. Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), argues that the eventual victory of the FLN depended significantly on its ability to provide medical or welfare provision.

[75] J. Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria*, 320–1, 326–31.

ALN fighters did, on occasion, engage in acts of violence or rape, in general the commanders imposed a very severe disciplinary regime that respected the customs and values of honour that lay at the heart of peasant society.[76] This was one crucial area in which the ALN won support among rural populations in contrast to the French military in which abuse of women, rape, and sexual humiliation of males was endemic.[77]

The system of FLN justice provides perhaps the most interesting evidence for the operation of a counter-state, and why, in many ways it was preferred by the peasantry to that of the French legal system. In March 1958 Captain Lucien Paul Fauque, a specialist in Muslim jurisprudence in the General government, making use of the hundreds of documents that had been captured, wrote a detailed secret report on the FLN system of justice, '*Recherches sur l'organisation judiciaire rebelle en Algérie*'.[78] The report identified a system of '"parallel jurisdictions" that draw away those cases that should come before our courts', and the OPA 'sets out to prove that the masses are capable of administering themselves, that it is sovereign, since justice constitutes precisely one of the attributes of that sovereignty'. Although the FLN legal system in the countryside was still in its early stages, and in places quite 'rudimentary', there did exist an ever more sophisticated FLN hierarchy of local and higher courts. In the fractions minor matters were dealt with by the OPA Council of five, or at *douar* level by a council of notables, but more serious military and civilian issues came before a sector tribunal, while the most grave offenses, such as capital offenses, or appeals, were reserved to the regional court (*madjlis*) or *wilaya* council.[79] Peripatetic FLN judges, normally trained *cadis* or *Ulema* scholars, travelled to dispense justice in the more isolated interior, as in the Ouarsenis near Teniet El Haad, while near the towns of the plain, as in Orleansville, there were permanent higher tribunals.[80]

The report analysed in detail how and why this 'parallel' system was so effective that the business of the French local JPs, tribunals, and assize courts was collapsing. The number of cases coming before the 119 JPs was only 10 per cent of the pre-war norm in zones of strong rebel activity, and 40 per cent in the towns and plains under French control. Statistics for the number of cases heard in the local cantonal courts show a dramatic decline between 1954 and 1957, providing an index of regional differences (Table 5).

[76] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 631, execution by a tribunal in *wilaya* 5, 'He sleeps with the wives of [FLN] soldiers and civilians. He winks at every woman who comes past. And he is a major informer.'

[77] Raphaëlle Branche, 'Des viols pendant la guerre d'Algérie', *Vingtième siècle* 74 (2002), 123–32.

[78] AOM14CAB233, report of the *Direction générale des affaires politique*, 2 March 1958, 26 pp. typed. The author can be identified as Captain Lucien Paul Fauque since in August 1958 he presented a much extended version for his CHEAM diploma (*brevet*) under the title, *Réalités sociologiques et problems judiciaires d'Algérie*, 88 pp. with app., ANP 20000046/108.

[79] On the FLN justice system, see also M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 619–36.

[80] Fauque, *Réalités*, identified the FLN justice in Teniet el Haad as Slimane ben Mokhtar Matene, the *cadi* of the colonial *mahakma* court.

Table 5 Statistics of number of courts cases heard in the six cantonal courts within the Orleansville parquet. Source Fauque, *Réalités*, app., ANP, 20000046/108. The statistics need to be treated with caution, but might indicate a more radical avoidance of the French legal system where FLN organization was strongest, as in the Duperré and Ténès area.

Canton	1954	1957	1957 as % of 1954
Orleansville	1,535	164	10.7%
Duperré	1,102	34	3.1
Oued Fodda	620	33	5.3
Ténès	873	4	0.46
Teniet el Haad	564	55	9.8
Vialar	368	87	23.6

In the six cantonal courts of the parquet of Orleansville, for example, the total cases fell from 5,602 in 1954 to 377 in 1957, or 6.7 per cent of the pre-war level, which was lower than most regions like Oran (18.1 per cent) and Blida (18.6 per cent), and close to the lowest, Tizi Ouzou (3.3 per cent), the radicalized FLN fortress of Kabylie. The emoluments of the mass of minor court officers, clerks, ushers, and interpreters were so reduced that many had been forced to resign, 'threatening', noted the *Procureur général* of the Oran Appeal Court, 'to completely paralyse the justice system in some *arrondissements*'.

Fauque, in accounting for this crisis, subscribed to the official discourse on FLN terrorism, 'this blackmail through fear weighs heavily on the masses and makes them obey blindly', but this was contradicted by his subsequent analysis.[81] There can be little doubt of the brutal severity of much of the FLN justice that was dispensed, that could range from cash fines, to beatings (*bastonnades*) and execution, but on balance this did not mean that the French system of justice was preferred by the peasantry. The rural inhabitants might have been dissuaded by the FLN from making use of French justices, but in addition, under the conditions of insecurity that reigned, it was a daunting experience to travel down into the urban centres by bus, lorry, or taxi, even when military convoys offered some protection from the frequent ambushes, and travellers had first to procure an ID card, and pass through numerous checkpoints. Even before the war the peasantry had often tried to avoid French courts and lawyers since the judicial process was drawn out, costly, incomprehensible, and regulated by alien western values. This was further compounded by the fact that the French judicial system suffered from the general features of '*sous-administration*', the fact that in the vast interior expanses of isolated mountain and desert, peasants and nomads were so

[81] Fauque also slotted the FLN system of justice into the widely accepted theories of revolutionary war and 'parallel hierarchies', expounded by Colonel Lacheroy.

distant from the nearest administrators that they simply avoided travelling to carry out even the legal requirements of civil registration.[82] The report noted that some populations were a hundred kilometres from the nearest French justice. By contrast the local ALN justices were on the doorstep, and on average served 1,000 to 2,000 inhabitants, while the French JPs served, on average, 73,176 people.

The so-called 'clandestine' or unofficial *djemâas* at fraction level had for decades regulated a range of minor, everyday issues of village life, from inheritance and contracts, to family matters and disputes between neighbours. The new FLN OPA was simply able to integrate or to build upon long-standing systems of local justice, and the elders from the *djemâa* continued the same functions, while the *kasma* tribunals heard many of the cases that had previously gone to distant, urban-based justices or courts.[83] FLN justice was cheap and fast, but also worked along the lines of Islamic jurisprudence that was closer to the customary law of rural society.[84] The FLN justices also eroded the continuing wartime work of the French courts by reviewing and changing some of the earlier decisions they had made, and in one well-documented case rapidly settled a dispute of landownership between relatives that had been dragging on in the French legal system since 1951. 'The slowness of the procedure', concluded the report, 'the sometimes ruinous legal costs for those on low income, the distance of the tribunals that necessitate long and expensive journeys, are so many very real factors that turn litigants away from our system of Justice'.[85] The only solution that the report could suggest to the rapid advance of FLN justice was by training young legal auxiliaries or students in Muslim law who could be attached to the SAS, and who could match the rapid, low-cost system of the enemy.

By January 1957 the colonial government was becoming deeply concerned that the OPA system was putting down deep roots in rural society and becoming more refined in its forms of organization. As Captain Fauque noted the FLN's 'para-judicial organs' were creating, 'an administrative vacuum that was doing away with the relationships and contacts between the two communities'.[86] A report from Oued Cherf in the northern Constantinois noted that the rural masses were

[82] This showed itself in official estimates of the huge number of '*omis*', those who were never registered at birth, and did not exist for the colonial state, a situation that many families preferred if it made conscription of sons more difficult.

[83] The report recorded a huge range of adjudications, from adultery, theft, fraud, and assaults, to civil matters of sales, contracts, loans, marriage, divorce, and acts of association. On the importance of the 'parallel' system of informal community justice that existed entirely separate from the French system, see J. P. Charnay, *Vie musulmane*, 223–34.

[84] The FLN justices normally charged a rate of one-tenth of the sums that plaintiffs were seeking, or fixed tariffs, as did the Kabyle codes (*kanouns*) of the nineteenth century, such as 5,000 for the theft of a chicken.

[85] AOM 9140/152, report of SAS Francis Garnier, 22 October 1956, noted that six armed rebels arriving in the *douar* Béni bou Mileuk, had settled a land dispute between two families that had dragged on for several years, without resolution, in the French courts.

[86] Fauque, *Réalités*, 26.

deliberately moving into the enemy camp not because of terrorist pressure. It was feared that they were adjusting to the OPA system: 'Its simple way of carrying out justice, freed from all the complicated judicial apparatus of our civilization, satisfies the inclinations of an impoverished pleb', and to this extent the rebel system, 'was closest to the wishes of the rural masses'.[87] In the same month Robert Lacoste gave his backing to Servier's *Opération Pilote* to try and arrest and reverse this process.

The Question of Violence, Terror, and Protection

The ALN in the Chelif region was able to set about the creation of a counter-state during 1955–6 as the mountainous interior became a no-go zone for the administration and even the military could only penetrate there in heavily armed units during daylight hours. However, by late 1956 the French army became engaged in a counterinsurgency push to dislodge the ALN and this exposed peasant populations that had supported the FLN and the OPA to high levels of repression, including mass arrest and torture of males, and the destruction of houses by fire, bulldozer, and explosives. The response of the colonial intelligence services to loss of control of the *douars*, and the drying up of information from the *caids*, was to increase the funding of informers and the archives reveal that the flow of information was indeed considerable.

The greatest problem that the ALN faced in persuading peasants to support the liberation struggle was the inability to guarantee their protection from counter-insurgency operations that would reinstate a colonial administration, and reverse the power relations so that pro-French 'sleepers' and informers would seize back control and wreak revenge on the nationalists. Political commissars tried to reassure the population in the fraction assemblies through propaganda that greatly exaggerated the power of the ALN, grossly inflated the statistics of crushing victories over French forces as well as the level of international support from Egypt and elsewhere, and predicted an imminent end to the war. But as the conflict dragged on such inflated propaganda carried less weight with the exhausted peasants.

In a report of April 1957 from *kasma* 4311, 'Djeffar' noted that in general the moral of the population, in spite of 'sweep and search operations, executions, etc.', and the offensive actions of the SAS, remained good, but that the most demoralizing and psychological destabilizing factor came from informers. In the township of Ain Sultan the field guard Gaston had denounced a number of men who were now in prison. In June Ahmed ben Amouda had informed the French about an

[87] AOM 12CAB37, *GG Direction générale des affaires politiques*, monthly synthesis on CM, for January 1957.

ALN meeting of inhabitants in Vesoul, while a farm guard complained openly about the destruction of vines, and had informed a European that A. ben Zorha was keeping the livestock of *moudjahidines* on his farm, information that was passed on to the mayor.

Such loose talk or deliberate informing created a climate of deep suspicion and fear among the inhabitants and, reported Djeffar, their response was to demand that the ALN guarantee a permanent presence since they feared that in their absence: 'other informers would sell them out to their brothers or son-in-law who had engaged with the militias (*goumiers*), as had happened at Meharza (Djendel) in the case of two *goumiers*, Soufi et Rabah ben Arab. These two *goumiers* have terrorized several families known to them for small disputes reaching back into the old days.' This is a classic instance of the way in which civil wars have so often provided the occasion for opposing sides to play out long-standing, inter-family or clan disputes and vendettas. But the key point I would make is that the standard perception of the security forces, and of some later historians, that the FLN held sway over the population through a brutal compliance terrorism, does not necessarily hold true. In this instance the peasantry was appealing to the ALN to maintain its presence so as to contain potential informers.

There were occasions during which guerrilla forces did engage in horrific massacres and killings on a large scale, the most notorious being the slaughter of entire villages of men, women, and children at Melouza/Beni Ilmane.[88] But such violence was the exception and, in general, acts of terrorism were carried out against carefully targeted individuals who presented a very real, and often mortal, threat to the ALN. As we have seen, the FLN tended not to act from a politics of 'class war' against those who had for years worked hand-in-glove with the colonial administration and police, the notables, *caids*, and field guards. On the contrary they were frequently offered the opportunity of joining the OPA administration in the *douars* or secretly working with the ALN by staying in post in the urban centres and providing money and intelligence. It was those *caids* and minor officials who rejected any such advances, and overtly declared their support for the French cause, who were selected for assassination as 'traitors'.[89]

Azzedine recounts how, as head of a *kasma* in *wilaya* 4, he had the heavy responsibility as a mere 21-year-old, of carrying out investigation of suspect informers. Witnesses and accused were cross-examined in some semblance of justice but ultimately he alone made the decision to free or execute an accused

[88] Jacques Simon, *Le massacre de Melouza Algérie—juin 1957* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 193–202. In *wilaya* 4, see Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 223, the condemnation of Mustapha Lek'hal for his killing of all the occupants of a burning farmhouse, but his punishment was no more than a transfer to Tunisia.

[89] The report for *kasma* 4311 has three separate entries under the rubric 'executed traitors' during the period from April to September 1957, but one of these related to a man who had raped his sister-in-law and carried out a wounding with a knife.

individual. While recognizing, with hindsight, the absence of the proper judicial process of peacetime, Azzedine remarks that in a time of war the ALN had little choice in the matter: 'During revolutionary times one cannot afford the luxury of allowing suspect people to go free.'[90] Where a summary justice became extremely damaging to the FLN was during the wave of paranoia that swept through *wilaya* 3 into *wilaya* 4 during 1958, the so-called French dirty-tricks operation known as the '*complot bleu*', that led commanders to believe that hundreds of young and educated urban militants who went into the maquis were part of a vast French conspiracy. Many hundreds of innocent men and women were executed, but in global terms Azzedine was probably correct in his claim that very few peasants were the subject of 'revolutionary justice'.

Far more critical for the ALN support-base among the peasantry was the inability of the guerrillas to protect the population from collective violence by the security forces. The ALN was faced with the 'partisan dilemma', as was the French or Greek resistance during the Second World War, in knowing that any offensive acts that were planned would trigger disproportionate violence against the entire population.[91] Since the ALN did not have the firepower and means to engage in conventional battle with the French, they adopted the classic guerrilla strategy of surprise attack on a convoy or army post, rapid disengagement, and a forced-march retreat to a safe haven. For the *moudjahidines*, who shared in a masculine culture centred on the heroic warrior and martyr, it was disarming that the elderly, women, and children were the victims of French repression while they, the highly mobile soldiers, could flee to safety.

The tension between peasants and guerrillas on this issue surfaced, for example, over the question of the recruitment and deployment of locals as auxiliaries (*moussebilines*). The peasant auxiliaries, both men and women, provided the relatively small local ALN units with a massive support base to carry out a range of tasks, from acting as guides and lookouts to cooking, washing, transport, and sabotage. The *moussebilines* were often organized at night into large bands of hundreds of men and women, equipped with saws, pickaxes, and spades, and, under ALN direction, led to cut down telegraph posts, fruit trees, and vines, or to dig trenches across the roads leading into the mountains.[92] The peasantry was often resistant to this compulsory labour, especially as it was precisely this form of

[90] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 216–17. M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 627, minutes of the military tribunal, *Nahia* 332 (Kabylie), 17 November 1959, condemning a woman to death for joining a SAS unit: 'We are in a period of revolution. This moves forward through force and blood. Indulgence is useless for the National Cause', since it would weaken 'the fear that the ALN inspires'.

[91] See, for example, Rick Stroud, *Kidnap in Crete* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), on the abduction of General Kreipe in August 1944 by SOE agent Patrick Leigh Fermor, an act that had little strategic value and led to predictable reprisals, the destruction of villages in the Amari and the execution of many male inhabitants.

[92] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 70; Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 210, 220.

action that was most frequently countered by the French military with heavy collective punishment of the nearest village.[93] One tactic used by the ALN to try and protect the population from indiscriminate violence was to train the peasants to evacuate their houses as soon as look-outs detected approaching French soldiers, and to flee into the surrounding forests to conceal themselves in caves or underground bunkers.[94] But this rarely worked, as was witnessed by Louis Kergoat in the Djebel Bissa in May 1957 when, in response to a big military operation, all the men of the village fled into the forest. After a week the hungry and exhausted men were forced to capitulate and, through the collective voice of their *djemâa*, attempted to negotiate their surrender to the French army.[95]

ALN commanders were not always squeamish about the potential violence that their actions might unleash on the peasantry, and justified such sacrifice as a necessary and unavoidable consequence of war. But, further than that, officers were not beyond planning actions that were deliberately calculated to lead to reprisals that would drive the population firmly onto their side.[96] Azzedine often chose to locate an ambush close to a village that had tried to engage in fence-sitting, uncommitted to either side, so that it would fall victim to brutal reprisals and rally to the ALN.[97]

However, in time the ALN began to develop strategies that would make it less dependent on the population and enable it to escape, to some degree, the 'partisan dilemma'. Historians of the Algerian War of Independence have interpreted the ALN insurgency as a classic instance of the Maoist phenomenon of revolutionary war, in line with the image of the insurgents as fish in water, sustained by a popular peasant support base. This was certainly true for the early stages of maquis formation, but through time, the ALN was able to organize itself so as to operate and survive in an autonomous way, free from dependency on villagers. This was achieved in a number of ways. While ALN units were much dependent on peasant food resources in an early phase, in time the army created a sophisticated logistics in which most supplies were bought through credit arrangements with urban traders or farmers, and stored in a vast network of underground silos and caves. Large *katiba* units of a hundred men, that were constantly mobile, could move from one depot to another, without having to make contact with villages. To a point it suited ALN commanders to keep their soldiers segregated

[93] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 76–7.

[94] R. Medoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 78. Paul and Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La république et son armée au 'peril subversive'. Guerre et action psychologique 1945–1960* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005), 249, the tactic of fleeing and creating a void, before French units could make contact with civilian population, was practised by the Vietminh, and may have influenced Algerian soldiers who served in Vietnam.

[95] L. Kergoat, *Frères contemplatifs*, 128–9.

[96] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 80.

[97] Azzedine, *C'était la guerre*, 328. The strategy was deployed on a large scale by Zighout Youssef in launching a peasant insurrection in the northern Constantinois on 20 August 1955 that was calculated to precipitate Algerian and French massacres that would impel the War of Independence into a deeper and irrevocable crisis; see C. Mauss-Copeaux, *Algérie, 20 août 1955*.

from the village population: it reduced the danger of informers, and avoided the disciplinary problems that inevitably arose from close *moudjahidine* contact with local women that could trigger angry resentment in a society of honour, and at the same time reduced the problem of compromising the inhabitants through association and exposing them to French collective vengeance.[98]

In late 1957, after the Soummam conference, there are signs of a concerted ALN policy to reduce guerrilla dependency on local populations, to break up large and vulnerable fighting units like the *katiba* into smaller, highly mobile groups that could move constantly through the mountains and quickly escape through the sieve of French operations. This went along with instructions to remove women nurses across the border into Morocco and Tunisia, and a small number of extremely tough, young peasant women, instead of cooking and washing in the village, now carried out the same duties attached to mobile units. Some ALN officers shrugged off the mass *regroupements* of the peasantry, intended by the French military to cut away their support base, and described it as a blessing in disguise since they were no longer encumbered by responsibility for the supply and protection of desperate and hungry rural populations.[99] ALN units were no longer dependent, as they had been at first, on peasants who had a knowledge of the terrain, since many locals had now become integrated into the guerrilla as guides and trackers. Finally, the dispersed settlement patterns of the Dahra and Ouarsenis favoured the guerrilla forces since their main point of contact with the peasantry was rarely with nucleated village settlements, but dispersed farmhouses (*mechtas*), each surrounded by its own gardens and fields and protected behind thick barriers of cactus and bush. When small ALN units, couriers, and transports crossed the mountains on a grid of mule tracks, they moved through a network of secure farmhouses in which they could find food and rest, protected within the stockaded and windowless *mechta* from potential informers.[100] ALN networks in the Ouarsenis and Dahra, unlike the large villages of Kabylie, can be best seen as a complex of cross-mountain mule tracks that joined up one isolated farmhouse

[98] M. Harbi and G. Meynier (eds), *Le FLN documents*, 624, military instructions for *wilaya* 1 in November 1957 stated: 'Company commanders or heads of section must above all chose a place distant from the houses as a location for its fighters.... It is forbidden for combatants to receive clothing or food supplies not supplied by the [ALN] organization.'

[99] M. Cornaton, *Les regroupements de la décolonisation en Algérie* (Paris: Editions Ouvrières, 1967), 61–2; Chibani Bachir, an ALN nurse, wrote as early as July 1955 that the ALN mocked French moves to evacuate the population from the mountains. The guerrillas were now more secure, attracted less attention from bombing or artillery, and could live at ease: 'in short, to enjoy the full freedom of the lands in which we are the sole masters and where we do not risk being denounced to the administration.'

[100] AOM 5Q/130, Abdelkader Mekki, who escaped from the ALN to a SAS post at Meurad on 2 November 1957, in a statement detailed the system of relays. During a two-week cross-mountain journey under escort from Teniet el Haad, they had walked on tracks from one over-night refuge to another, halting in *gourbis*, Arab cafés, and forestry houses that were manned by small teams that provided food and shelter.

with another, a system that proved singularly difficult for the French security forces to combat.

Youth Recruits and Family Solidarity

This final section returns to the eternal question, one that has constantly haunted contemporaries and historians alike, that of the nature or degree of support by the rural masses for either the French cause or that of the independence movement. Stathis Kalyvas offers a sophisticated, political science model in reply to this conundrum, one that draws on a rational choice theory in which populations altered their behaviour in relation to whichever side was dominant in the locality.[101] Each *douar* or fraction was confronted with an ebb-and-flow of contending forces, perhaps for a period under ALN control followed by a 'reconquest' by the colonial army and administration, and back again. However, occupying and incumbent forces did not swap places in a zero-sum game, and when counter-insurgents during *Opération Pilot* drove out the FLN from a particular locale, the population did not return to the status quo ante, since an irreversible, qualitative change had taken place. With the arrival of ALN units and the creation of the OPA, many thousands of peasants were, for the first time, subjected to intense propaganda by the political commissars and achieved a new level of political consciousness. This remained in place, even when colonial troops marched back into a *douar* or village to 'liberate' the people from what was regarded as the terrorist grip.

But, perhaps even more significant, was the extent to which the existential decision whether to support the French side or the ALN, one that carried momentous, and often deadly consequences for the future of the group, was invariably taken as a family or group, rather than individual, decision. This carried with it certain moral consequences and sacred obligations.[102] As we have seen, the extended peasant family (*ayla*) was controlled by the patriarch who made key decisions in relation to the family economy, but also in terms of external power relations and politics. Abderrahmane Krimi, later a sector commander in *wilaya* 4, raised in a peasant family in the Dahra, recounts that his father held all power in the household and supervised his adult sons in relation to the daily tasks of the farm. On returning from the fields in the evening, they immediately approached the father, 'to greet him by bowing and kissing his hand as a sign of respect and

[101] S. Kalyvas, *The Logic*, 12: 'most people prefer to collaborate with the political actor that best guarantees their survival.'

[102] E. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 2, argues that while material grievances, mainly access to land, played a role, 'emotional and moral motives were essential to the emergence and consolidation of insurgent collective action'.

deference'.[103] Every evening, after the meal, Krimi's father would gather the household together and pass judgement on each person's behaviour, criticizing one for failing to say the evening prayer, another for being lazy on the job. In 1955, on the night of the feast of Achoura, the father made a dramatic 'public' announcement in the form of a religious oath in which he dedicated himself and the family group to the national cause.[104]

Historians have often identified the FLN that emerged in late 1954 as an organization dominated by a generation of relatively young militants that was keen to engage in revolutionary action and, in doing so, broke away from an older generation of conservative and law-abiding fathers and elders. However, autobiographical accounts show how youths, taking the momentous step of going into the maquis, invariably did so not as an act of revolt against the father, but as a moment in which they sought his blessing. Rémy Madoui, on the eve of leaving the Chelif valley for the Ouarsenis maquis, was typical. He felt obliged by respect for his father to announce his departure: 'He gave me permission to join the maquis, he gave me his blessing and wished every possible success to me and Algeria.'[105]

But also at work here was a division of labour in the FLN organization between young maquisards, and their fathers and elders who remained on the farm or in the urban centres. Guerrillas faced extremely harsh physical conditions in the mountains, shortage of food and a harsh climate, and, in particular, constant, long-distance marches to escape pursuing French forces. Only extremely fit men could survive this daily ordeal, and this was reflected in the fact that the FLN tended to recruit men aged between 18 and 35 years. Intelligence files on the leaders of *nahia* 1 (Miliana) and the five *kasmas* within it, identify two *moujahidine* aged 19 years, eleven in their 20s, and nine in their 30s, with an average age of 27 years.[106] But the *kasma* leaders tended to be recruited among more mature and experienced militants, and it seems likely that local peasant fighters, most of them illiterate, would have been younger. The older FLN militants, the fathers, uncles, and elder brothers of *moujahidine*, instead of joining the maquis, tended to remain on the family farm or in the towns where they still played a vital role in the ALN. The peasant auxiliaries (*moussebilines*) continued to work the land, but

[103] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 38.

[104] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 44. The father's wish for martyrdom was to be realized when French soldiers arrived at his house and killed him on 20 June 1957.

[105] R. Madoui, *J'ai été fellagha*, 29. Not all fathers or elder males gave their support to radical sons who militated with the Messalists, and later the FLN; see K. Rahem, *Le sillage de la tribu*, 250, the young militant Ahmed Nahil was castigated by his peasant-entrepreneur father, a conservative patriarch, for his MTLD activities and getting involved in politics 'that troubled his business with the French'.

[106] AOM 5Q/130, Gendarmerie Affreville, 24 February 1958. Of these, about 62 per cent originated from urban centres, a reflection of the fact that ALN cadres were recruited from towns since they tended to have more political experience and had the level of education that would enable them to administer the bureaucratic FLN system.

emerged at night, armed with shotguns, to take part in raids.[107] Typically, the urban-based fathers and older male relatives of the maquisards, many of them shopkeepers, traders, skilled artisans, hospital porters, mechanics, and transport workers, although unfit to join the guerrilla forces, fulfilled an equally useful function by staying in employment and by raising funds and organizing logistic supplies for the maquis. Many of them, as relatively prosperous *commerçants*, builders, and owners of transport companies, could raise considerable funds for the maquis, while using their professional expertise and connections to funnel clandestine supplies into the *bled*. Such urban-rural familial networks meant that Algerians did not, as in the Kalyvas model, occupy at any one moment in time separate zones that were controlled either by the French or the ALN, but integrated familial and clan networks that spanned the two spaces.

For the peasant families of the high mountains 'giving' one or more sons to the revolutionary cause as a *moudjahid* (fighter of the faith) was both a potential act of sacrifice and a long-term religious commitment that bound the whole group together.[108] In some mountain regions almost all peasant households had seen the departure of one or more sons for the maquis, leaving elderly men, women, and children to run the farms, so that even when French forces drove out the ALN and claimed to 'pacify' a *douar*, they remained loyal to the liberation cause.[109] To do otherwise would have been to renege on their blood ties and the sacred struggle to which the family group as a whole had committed itself.

The extent to which the FLN in the Chelif was constructed through the amalgamation of extended family-kin cells is reflected in the way in which exceptionally militant micro-clans were almost entirely wiped out during the war. The security forces, and in particular *colons*-dominated militias like the *Unités territoriales* (UT), frequently wreaked a bloody revenge on the families of ALN guerrillas by destroying their homes or by outright murder.[110] The father of the officer Abderrahmane Krimi was killed in his home on 20 June 1957, an act that increased the determination of his sons to fight the French, and by the end of the war a total of twenty-one members of the Krimi family had died, including four women and two children.[111] The Bounil family from the *douar* El Meddad in the Ouarsenis lost twenty-one men killed by the French army between 1958 and

[107] AOM 5Q/130, gendarmerie report Molière, 6 July 1957, identified forty-eight *moussebelines* of the *douar* Bethaia who, with a higher average age of 32 years, included five men in their 40s, and two in their 50s.

[108] Kamel Chachoua, *L'Islam Kabyle (XVIIIe–XXe siècles)*, Religion, état et société en Algérie (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 2002), 251–3.

[109] The French army targeted families that had sons absent in the maquis, and subjected them to torture and massacre. M. Teguia, 'L'Algérie en Guerre' (thesis), 635–7, detailed lists of entire families butchered in the Ténès region in February and March 1960, among them thirty-six burned to death by napalm in the *douar* Sinfita, two men, thirteen women, and twenty-one children.

[110] The family of the communist militant Mustapha Saadoun was decimated in this way by the UT in Cherchell; see Chapter 9, p. 185, n. 46.

[111] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 229, app., 'Liste des martyrs de la famille Krimi, commune de Beni Haoua'.

1961, three of whom were aged 15, while most of them were in their 20s and 30s.[112] This was not exceptional as can be seen in the case of many other families, including the Miraoui, which lost fifty-five members or *chahid*.[113]

Moreover, as I have suggested, on a more pragmatic level, the wages, family benefits, and pensions paid to *moudjahidines* and some *moussebilines* were high enough to act as an incentive to young men to join the maquis, especially as in the central mountains there existed a huge reservoir of under-employed males who found it difficult to find any kind of regular work. There were good reasons, therefore, as to why many peasant households that had been largely untouched by nationalism before November 1954 were radicalized by the ALN during the counter-state phase of guerrilla control, and 'invested' many thousands of sons into its ranks. Even when the French army drove back the ALN to 'pacify' and reclaim such areas, the population did not simply switch back to the French side, as the Kalyvas model suggests, but retained a strong allegiance to the liberation struggle. General Ailleret, visiting the Guelma region in June 1960, was not deceived by the orchestrated displays of French patriotism that greeted him in the *regroupement* camps. The army had still not been able to eliminate the ALN guerrillas up in the hills, he remarked: 'This would have inevitably happened if the population had not assisted them in secret', and, he concluded, 'the strategy of pacification through social and psychological action gives excellent results in appearance, on the surface, but beneath the surface the "Mohammeds" of the outback (*bled*) are not with us but with their brothers in the mountain (*djebels*), more or less actively, certainly, but with them all the same'.[114]

Lastly, it can be noted that the joint family, as an autonomous political unit, offered special advantages for the extension, consolidation, and security of the guerrilla networks. In a situation in which the main threat to the FLN-ALN, both in townships and rural areas, came from informers, militants tended to build or extend their networks through contacting individuals that they knew and trusted, including life-long friends and members of the family or close relatives.[115] In his diary the teacher and writer Mouloud Feraoun evoked the claustrophobic climate of fear and paranoia that deepened in Kabyle village society as the war progressed, one in which individuals had to watch every word in public spaces, shunned social contact, and retreated into the sanctuary of the family or closed community, a

[112] M. Teguia, 'L'Algérie en guerre' (thesis), 640, app. 14.

[113] L. Bouragaa, *Les hommes*, 87. Intelligence reports that identified hundreds of individual ALN combatants also indicate the presence of groupings of men from the same family; see AOM 5Q/130, a report of the Affreville gendarmerie, [undated], identifies thirty-six men in the *katiba* 'Zoubiria' that had all been recruited in the *douar* Gouraya in December 1957, trained in Tunisia, and returned into the area in March 1958. Among the *moudjahidines* were four men from the Medjari family (ages 22 to 34 years), three Bouamama (aged 21 to 23), and four Ouahlima (aged 22 to 35). AOM 5Q/130, *report gendarmerie*, Molière, 6 July 1957, of forty-eight *moussebelines* all from the *douar* Bethaia, at least twenty-seven (56 per cent) were from family groups of two to five men.

[114] P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 490.

[115] D. Ait-El-Djoudi, *ALN*, 95.

place of primary solidarity and unquestioning trust.[116] FLN local recruitment through personal and familial contacts meant that clandestine networks tracked from urban centres, out into the interior, from farmhouse to farmhouse, along a chain that linked households tied by kin and marriage alliances. One of the unseen consequences of such chains of kin and village solidarity is that it tended to reinvigorate patrimonialism during the war, at the very time that the FLN was attempting to combat 'regionalism' in favour of a unifying nationalism.

[116] N. MacMaster, 'The "Silent Native"', 290–6.

PART IV

OPÉRATION PILOTE

Anthropology Goes to War, 1956–8

16
The Genesis of *Opération Pilote*

By late 1956 the civil and military authorities in Algiers were confronting a mounting crisis, a conjuncture marked by problems in the implementation of the crucial communal reform, the failure of conventional operations to contain the ALN, the humiliation of the Suez adventure in November, and the apparent surrender of Tunisia and Morocco by the detested Parisian government. The arrival of General Salan as Commander-in-Chief in December, along with other veterans from Indochina and survivors of Dien Bien Phu, marked a radicalization and politicization of the armed forces. On 7 January police powers were handed to General Massu who quickly launched the 'Battle of Algiers'. Many senior officers, backed by colonial 'ultras', were determined not to lose Algeria, the jewel in the imperial crown, and were prepared to resort to 'unconventional' means and to make a last stand against global communism and the 'traitors' in Paris.[1] It was within this context that the Algiers government sought a solution to the rapid expansion of the FLN in the Chelif region, by launching *Pilote* 1, a major experiment in counterinsurgency.

A key element in the radicalization of the armed forces was the development of the theories of counterinsurgency, the doctrine of revolutionary warfare (DGR) or psychological warfare. The theory of DGR was developed mainly by officers who had served with the professional military corps during the war in Indo-China. After the crushing defeat by the Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 they sought an explanation for their humiliating defeat through the study of Mao Tse-tung, and the strategy of communist guerrilla warfare. A younger generation of officers, inspired by Charles Lacheroy, began to reject the methods of conventional warfare espoused by senior conservative generals, a classic 'front' engagement with heavy, mechanized divisions, for strategies that involved a 'surface defense', the winning over of the support of the civilian population through propaganda, psychological control, social welfare reform, and other so-called 'hearts and minds' techniques.[2] After the withdrawal from Vietnam, and

[1] On the crisis in morale and politicization of the French armed forces under the 4th Republic, see G. Elgey, *La fin*, ch. 3, 'Une armée égarée', 193–254; John S. Ambler, *The French Army in Politics, 1945–62* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1966).

[2] On the meteoric rise of Colonel Charles Lacheroy as a theoretician in the Paris *État-major*, see Paul Villatoux, 'Le colonel Lacheroy, théoricien de l'action psychologique', in Jean-Charles Jauffret (ed.), *Des hommes et des femmes en guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Autrement, 2003), 494–508; Paul and Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La république*; Marie-Monique Robin, *Escadrons de la mort, L'école française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004); Mathieu Rigouste, *L'ennemi intérieur. La généalogie coloniale et militaire*

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contemplating the lessons to be learned from that defeat, the theorists of counter-insurgency emphasized the importance of 'human contact with the population', and concluded, 'in the end, whoever wins over the population wins the game'.[3]

Since the ALN guerrilla force found a primary base among the isolated, mountain populations, it would be important for French counterinsurgents to gain an expert sociological or anthropological knowledge of the organization and mindset of archaic 'tribal' societies, the better to propagandize and control them. Colonial armies had for centuries used sophisticated intelligence systems and ethnology in order to penetrate and manipulate non-European societies, and had often deployed indigenous informers, native auxiliaries, and 'third force' collaborators to achieve this end. In French North Africa soldier-scholars and native administrators, from the nineteenth-century Algerian *Bureaux arabes* to the Moroccan *Affaires indigènes* (AI), had a long and prestigious history of research into the social, political, cultural, and linguistic history of tribal peoples among whom they often lived in close contact for years.[4]

What was unusual about the 1957 *Opération Pilote* was that the colonial government not only hired the services of a professionally trained ethnologist, Jean Servier, as an adviser, but adopted his strategic master plan and gave him the leading role in its implementation. *Opération Pilote* provides an exemplary case of anthropology 'going to war' and a key aim is to examine the role of ethnology as a political science in understanding the socio-political organization of the peasantry in the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains. As we have seen, the PCA, the Messalists, and the FLN-ALN, especially in their drive to organize among the peasantry after 1947, were compelled to adjust their propaganda and forms of organization to take account of the socio-political and cultural practices of the rural population. The FLN and the French counterinsurgents were, using Tillion's expression, 'complimentary enemies', and each side was engaged in a battle to see which would prove most skilful in developing a knowledge that would give them control over the population.

Charles Lacheroy gradually spread his radical doctrine through the upper échelons of the armed forces during 1954 to 1955, before making a dramatic breakthrough in February 1956 when, with the backing of the Minister of Defence, Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, and General Guillaume, head of the Paris

de l'ordre sécuritaire dans la France contemporaine (Paris: La Découverte, 2009). Since 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan there has been an explosive growth in the academic study of 'small wars'; see Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency*; and Hannah Gurman (ed.), *Hearts and Minds: A People's History of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

[3] Paul and Marie-Catherine Villatoux, *La république*, 459.

[4] Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claud Vatin, *L'Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris: Maspero, 1975); Edmund Burke, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam* (Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 2014).

État-major, he was appointed chair of the *Comité d'action psychologique*.[5] Lacheroy gathered around him a growing circle of influential 'disciples' who shared a disturbing, right-wing Catholic dystopia of the global advance of communism and materialism that threatened the essential values and very survival of both France and western civilization. In the geo-politics of the Cold War clash of civilizations, they believed, the titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil, the French army had a special mission to play in Algeria, the last bastion of the West. The key military instigators of *Opération Pilote* alongside Jean Servier, Colonel Goussault, and Lieutenant-Colonel André Feaugas, were both members of a cell of the fundamentalist *Cité catholique* that met in the Rue de Bac in Paris.[6] Goussault, who had served as General Salan's adviser on psychological warfare in Indochina, met and cultivated the career of the young ethnologist Servier in Paris during the spring of 1956, and trained him in the arts of revolutionary warfare, before moving to Algiers to take over from General Tabouis as head of the *Bureau psychologique* of the 10th Military Region (Algeria).[7]

Feaugas, who later headed *Pilote* operations in Orleansville alongside Servier, also moved to Algiers to head a newly formed organization, the *Officiers itinérants* (OI), a specialized propaganda unit. The OI, that played a central role in the Chelif experiment, was created by Lacoste on 5 July 1956, and consisted initially of twenty-five officers who were selected from among ex-prisoners of the Vietminh camps and/or from the Moroccan *Affaires indigènes* (AI) who had a high level of expertise in the culture, languages, and jurisprudence of the mountain Berbers.[8] It was thought that the ex-Vietminh prisoners, through being subjected to 'brain-washing' techniques in the camps, would have an insight into psychological warfare, and through their experience of starvation conditions be motivated by an almost rabid hatred of all things communist. The OI, that were compared to communist political commissars or the Jacobin emissaries of the French Revolution, were to have a peripatetic function, travelling in a circuit to army brigades in the field, to instruct commanders and their men in the art of

[5] P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 367–9.

[6] On the *Cité catholique*, the army, and the proto-facist ideologues Georges Sauge and Jean Ousset, see Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange, 'Intégrisme et national-catholicisme', *Esprit* 27.3 (1959), 515–42; Raphaëlle de Neuville, *Jean Ousset et la Cité catholique* (Buère: Dominique Martin Morin, 1998); M.-M. Robin, *Escadrons*, 151–64. The Rue de Bac circle, in addition to Goussault and Feaugas, included Colonel Gardes, Colonel Chateau-Jobert, and Colonel Cogniet, all active in what would later become the 5th Bureau.

[7] The *Bureau psychologique* would later, in August 1957, become the 5th Bureau; see M.-C. and Paul Villatoux, 'Le 5e Bureau en Algérie', in J.-C. Jauffret and M. Vaisse (eds), *Militaires*, 399–419.

[8] SHD 1H2533, Lacoste to Commander 10th Region, 5 July 1956. André Feaugas filled both categories: he served as an AI officer in the Middle Atlas from 1940 to 1950, and was then posted to Vietnam where he commanded a Moroccan Tabor unit and became a prisoner after the disastrous defeat of a large French force at Cao-Bang on the RC4 highway in September–October 1950.

propaganda, the use of slogans, cinema, loud-speakers, and leaflets, based on behaviourist theories of conditioned reflexes.[9]

By the summer of 1956 the military were becoming increasingly concerned that the FLN was winning the war in the mountains through the implantation of what Lacoste called 'parallel hierarchies'. The Vietminh had used Maoist strategies to penetrate and 'submerge' civil society through a host of organizations, from women's associations to youth and sporting clubs and village assemblies, so that the French army was unable to make any impact on the population. As the French intelligence services began to piece together the structure of the Algerian OPA, so they became convinced that this was an extension of the global communist system of *guerre révolutionnaire*, and unless this was quickly blocked and reversed, the army would face the same prospect of defeat that it had in Vietnam.[10] It was this fear of the imminent collapse of the Christian West that inspired a sense of urgency among Goussault and his fellow officers who saw themselves as crusaders manning the Algerian frontier against the barbarian hordes.[11] In order to locate and destroy the OPA, it was argued, the army would need to mobilize experts in sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science and, where necessary, be prepared to learn from, and even to copy, the techniques of the enemy.

The first large-scale experiment to carry out such an ambitious project took place in Kabylie during 1956, and I look at this first since *Opération Pilote* emerged in January 1957 as an attempt to learn from the disastrous failure of the earlier operation 'K' or '*Oiseau bleu*'.

Jean Servier and *Opération Oiseau bleu*

Jean Servier carried out fieldwork in the ethnology of the Berber societies of northern Algeria between 1949 and 1954, during which he achieved a moment of national glory in the rescue of two teachers, the Monnerot, and the impromptu defence of Arris, on 1 November 1954.[12] When Jacques Soustelle was appointed

[9] On the *Officiers itinérants*, see *Algérie 1957* (Ministre de l'Algérie), 60–6; P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 388–9. Feaugas replaced Victor Dadillon, the first commander of the OI, in October 1956.

[10] SHD 1H2533, Goussault's *Bureau psychologique* in a note of 9 February 1957 claimed of the FLN and communist OPA, 'The expansion of this infrastructure is advancing so rapidly that the whole of Algeria risks collapse in the near future'.

[11] The OI were bound together by a strong esprit de corps, met and socialized regularly, exchanged news through a Bulletin, and, driven by an *intégriste* ideology, saw themselves as an élite, marginalized by conventional generals and colonels that hated their interference and methods. The idea of a communist encirclement of Europe via Algeria was no mere rhetorical figure, as can be seen in the presentation made by General Allard, Goussault, and Godard at a SHAPE conference on 15 November 1957 (SHD 1H2409).

[12] On Jean Servier's career as ethnologist, see Fabien Sacriste, *Germaine Tillion, Jacques Berque, Jean Servier et Pierre Bourdieu. Des ethnologues dans la guerre d'indépendance algérienne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), 195–259.

Governor General of Algeria in January 1955 his immediate concern was to contain the insurrection in the Aurès mountains and appointed Servier to his cabinet on 15 February as a specialist adviser on the region. Soustelle, himself a prominent anthropologist, thus opened the door to the potential role of professional ethnologists in counterinsurgency, but within a week Servier's appointment was rescinded and he was replaced by Germaine Tillion, who had a far deeper knowledge of the Aurès.[13] During 1955 Servier, who was living with his wife and three children in a decrepit and leaking flat in the Rue du Pélican (1e), was facing an uncertain future and was desperate to find an intelligence posting in his native Algeria.[14] In late 1955 or early 1956 Servier was employed in Paris to teach preparatory courses for army officers who had volunteered to serve in the new and rapidly expanding SAS, and was taken under the wing of Colonel Goussault. By June 1956 his persistent attempts to gain a foothold in military operations paid off when he was appointed as a special adviser to Lucien Paye who had just arrived in Algiers to head Lacoste's *Direction générale des affaires politiques et de la fonction publique*. During the second half of 1956 Servier's main function was to assist Paye in the implementation of a vast reform of local government structures in the Maritime Kabyle region, but at the same time the ethnologist, probably with the backing of Goussault, managed to take on the general role of technical adviser in the HQ of General Olié, commander of *Zone opérationnelle de Kabylie* (ZOK) based in Tizi Ouzou.

From late 1955 or early 1956 the French planned a top-secret counter-guerrilla operation in the Kabyle Maritime region by which the military armed about three hundred men of the Iflissen tribe to fight the FLN. However, the men of so-called 'Force K' who were funded, trained, and supplied with modern weapons by the French, were part of an FLN operation of deception. On 1 October 1956 thirty-four soldiers of the *15th Bataillon de chasseurs alpins* (BCA) were drawn into a carefully laid ambush by 'Force K' and the rebels immediately quit their villages, along with their families, for the maquis. Although the *Oiseau bleu* fiasco was kept from the media, it represented one of the most humiliating and costly defeats of the French army during the Algerian War.[15]

[13] On this episode, see my paper, 'From ethnologist to counterinsurgent: Jean Servier's *Dans l'Aurès sur les pas des rebelles* (1955)', Conference, *Global and Local Histories of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) and After*, University of Oxford, 11–12 May 2017. Server was removed after accusations by academics of collaboration under Vichy and of cooperation with the army in repressive operations in the Aurès after 1 November 1954.

[14] Robert Hamada, 'Entretien avec Roger Curel', *Le croquent* 61–2 (2009), 128–37: Curel, while a student at the Musée de l'Homme, was a friend of Servier and shared the spartan conditions in the Rue du Pelican.

[15] *Opération Oiseau bleu* remains highly controversial today and, the subject of intense debate, I do not intend to discuss it in detail here, but to draw out the implications for Servier and the subsequent '*Opération Pilote*' that followed three months later. On the operation, see the leading ethnologist of Kabyle society, Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, 'Opération "*Oiseau bleu*", 1956: géostratégie et ethnopolitique en Montagne Kabyle', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* 41–2

The top-secret operation was probably initiated in the General Government under Soustelle, but by May 1956 was running into difficulty as the secret services, the DST and SDECE, refused to have anything to do with a murky adventure that was lacking in rigorous oversight.[16] Eventually in May General Lorillot, commander of the Algiers division, working with General Olié, head of the *Zone opérationnelle de Kabylie*, called in a special forces unit of the 11e Choc, led by Pierre Hentic, to assert a better control over the shadowy 'Force K'. Hentic had a long experience of organizing counterguerrilla operations in Vietnam and from April 1951 to July 1953 was head of the special forces commandos working with the Montagnards Hrés tribesmen.[17] In May 1956 Hentic was called to the General Government in Algiers where Colonel S. H. Parisot, head of the *Service de renseignements opérationnel* (SRO), explained the thinking behind the classic divide-and-rule strategy to play on the deep historic divisions in the Messalist movement that had surfaced during the 'Berber crisis' of 1949, and the ethnic tensions between Kabyles and Arabs. In a version of the 'Kabyle myth' Parisot claimed that the Berbers had always been resistant to Arabization and Islam, and the aim of the secret operation was to play on this division and to test it in the Kabyle Maritime region with the intention that it could serve as a model for COIN operations throughout the mountain regions of northern Algeria: 'From this first core zone' claimed Parisot, 'we intend to develop the Berber movement and then progressively expand into other regions such as the Tell and Ouarsenis'.[18]

Servier, who had carried out fieldwork among the Iflissen in 1952–3, teamed up with Hentic to investigate the activities of the tribe.[19] The eminent ethnologist Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, who studied the Iflissen over twenty years of fieldwork, has made a devastating critique of Servier's methodology and his failure to examine the dynamic social, economic, and political processes at work in local peasant society. For Servier, she claims, the Iflissen were frozen in an immobile world, a people without history or process, that could only be decoded through comparison with the ancient or classic world of the Mediterranean.[20] Hentic

(1986), 167–93; her major study, *Opération oiseau bleu*; and her reply to the right-wing historian General Maurice Faivre, 'Une auto-intoxication des services secrets. Histoire et Kabyle (1956)', *Revue d'histoire, guerre mondiale et conflits contemporains* 191 (1998), 37–67; M. Faivre, 'Un ethnologue de terrain face à la rébellion algérienne' (2005), accessed online on 22 November 2005.

[16] M. Faivre, 'Un ethnologue', 3, the 'Force K' project may have originated with Henri-Paul Eydoux, *conseiller technique* in Soustelle's cabinet, a man close to the governor and, like him, with a long track record in the secret service.

[17] Pierre Hentic, *Tant qu'il y aura des étoiles. Partisans 11* (n.p.: Éditions Maho, 2009).

[18] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 124–5; on Hentic's appointment by General Lorillot on 23 May 1956, see M. Faivre, 'L'Affaire K', 41.

[19] Jean Servier did not publish his research on the tribe until much later, see 'Un exemple d'organisation politique traditionnelle une tribu Kabyle, les Iflissen-Lebhar', *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la méditerranée* 2.2 (1966), 169–87.

[20] C. Lacoste-Dujardin, *Opération oiseau bleu*, 263–72. On the historical sociology of the region, see her earlier study, *Un village algérien. Structures et évolution récente* (Algiers: SNED, 1976).

recalled later that 'Professor Servier', who played the part of the pipe-smoking academic dressed in tweeds, taught the men of his commando unit on the '*vie et connaissance de la Kabylie*', explaining how the inhabitants of the Iflissen, 'descended from the Persians, far-distant conquerers'.[21]

Lacoste-Dujardin's argument that Servier was, quite simply, a poor ethnologist, can be verified from a reading of Servier's global scholarly output and his methodological lack of interest in a socio-historical understanding of the roots of peasant nationalism, and casts doubt on the extent to which the knowledge that Servier transmitted could have served to enlighten tough commandos or assisted them in their operations.[22] Servier did not simply ignore sociological explanation, but in his methodology claimed that it had no explanatory power at all and was irrelevant, since material factors such as economic deprivation and hunger played no part in causing anti-colonial revolt, a phenomenon that was an expression of profound spiritual factors.

Lacoste-Dujardin claims that Servier's ethnological understanding was so flawed that he failed to see what should have been evident, that the Iflissen had a long history of anti-French resistance. Any ethnologist worth their salt would have picked up on this and prevented the catastrophic fiasco that ensued. There is less substance to this charge since Servier and Hentic, working together during July to September 1956, began to establish a growing body of evidence that pointed to a dangerous FLN deception, and on several occasions they had brought this to the attention of Generals Olié and Gouraud.[23] This may explain how Servier and Hentic emerged from the 'K' fiasco with their reputation intact, and were both transferred a few months later to play a pivotal role in the Chelif.

The humiliating collapse of the *Oiseau bleu* operation in October marked a rapid closure of the experiment. The military in Kabylie, now under the command of General Gouraud, responded to the 'Force K' deception by unleashing a devastating revenge operation 'Djenad' during 9–11 October during which

[21] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 135, 138.

[22] Servier's doctoral thesis was published as *Les portes de l'année, l'Algérie dans la tradition méditerranéennes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1962), and, under a different title, as *Tradition et civilisation berbères. Les portes de l'année* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1985). The eminent sociologist Ernest Gellner, in a review, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 35.4 (1965), 446–8, was critical of the 'extensive' rather than intensive fieldwork on which it was based, and the consequent failure to provide a spatio-temporal location or context: 'the lack of anchorage either in one area thoroughly investigated, or even in the social realities of a precisely delimited period, makes one nervous of utilizing this material.' The author's assumption of the existence of a kind of continuous Algerian or even Mediterranean 'soul' was problematic. Modern political movements were largely absent, as was mention of the Algerian War, and the 'timelessness leaves one worried', about lack of reference to the profound way 'in which rural structures of Algeria have been eroded by recent history'.

[23] Servier met General Olié and warned him on 12 August and 6 September 1956. Unfortunately for Lacoste-Dujardin she failed to read *Adieu Djebels* in which Servier gave a long account of his role, and that of Hentic, in uncovering the FLN deception.

villages were destroyed and hundreds of people were killed.[24] The impact of the decimation was counterproductive for the French army since it drove the peasantry en masse deeper into the FLN camp. The 'classic' and heavy-handed methods of a generation of older commanders had been discredited and in December 1956 one army report remarked, 'The pacification experiment in Kabylie seems to have failed. We need to think about changing our methods'.[25] It was at this point that the colonial government, and in particular Lucien Paye, began to cast around for an alternative location to test a major COIN experiment.

The Return of Lucien Paye: The Battle for *commune* Reform

Historians' preoccupation with the dramatic events of *Oiseau bleu* has drawn attention away from a more mundane, but far more important, feature of Lacoste's global strategy, the attempt to carry out a radical restructuring of colonial government. It is this reform that holds the key to the *Pilote* project and the way in which the military set out to retake control of the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains from the ALN maquis during 1957.

The Special Powers Act of 16 March 1956 has usually been interpreted as a key step in the process of deepening military repression in Algeria, but it was also deployed by the Resident Minister Lacoste to begin a major acceleration in the reform of local government. The aim was to win over all Algerians, as well as international opinion in the UN, through a programme of full equality and assimilation, while guaranteeing the rights of Muslim civil law (*statut personnel*).[26] Historians have, in general, focused on Lacoste's role in facilitating systematic torture and killings, but this has tended to obscure the fact that he also attempted to push through, against both the FLN and the powerful block of conservative or ultra-*colons*, a major communal reform. Lacoste's decree of 28 June 1956 finally implemented a key promise of the organic law of 20 September

[24] C. Lacoste-Dujardin, *Opération oiseau bleu*, 66–92. Through fieldwork in the area after 1969 Lacoste-Dujardin recorded, especially through the oral testament of peasant women, the lasting psychological scars of this repression and the massacre of 41 per cent of males aged between 20 and 35 years.

[25] Quoted in C. Lacoste-Dujardin, *Opération*, 82. On the consensus that the 1956 Kabyle COIN experiment was a catastrophic failure, see Y. Courrière, *Le temps*, Vol. 2: *La guerre d'Algérie*, 263; A. Horne, *A Savage War*, 257; SHD 1H1409, report of the *Bureau psychologique 10e Région*, 9 September 1957, 'the failure of the Ollie [sic] experiment resulted in a grave loss of prestige for the French Authority and in a deep bitterness among the population that had been profoundly injured by the methods employed'. Servier seized the opportunity in *Adieu Djebels*, 40–1, 65, to paint an unflattering picture of Olié as a hide-bound general who had failed by his dismissive rejection of the ethnologist's expert advice. But the erudite Olié, who had twenty-five years experience of 'pacification' as an AI officer in Morocco, was not impressed by Servier's theories. On Olié, see Maurice Faivre, 'Le général d'armée Jean Olié de 1924 à 1962', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 215 (2004), 107–17.

[26] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 17.

1947, which had been in effect shelved under Naegelin, to suppress the seventy-eight *communes mixtes* and the *caidat* and to amalgamate the *douars* into some 1,100 new *communes* that would become elected municipalities under the law of 5 April 1884.[27] The *commune* reform was part of a wider raft of reforms that aimed to decentralize power by replacing the existing three existing prefectures with twelve new departments, and to initiate an integrated body of political, economic, and social change that would create a modern, so-called '*Algérie nouvelle*'.[28]

In order to oversee the urgent implementation of this reform Lacoste brought back Lucien Paye in the key role of Director General of Political Affairs, so that he was able to pick up where he had left off in 1946–8 as the chief architect of the communal and PACs developmental project to modernize peasant society. However, the reform had come about a decade too late, and Lacoste's government was now faced with the almost impossible task of a major restructuring of the entire government system in the unpropitious context of a vicious war of decolonization.[29]

The idea of communal reform, including the regeneration of the *djemâa* assemblies, had been kept alive during the intervening period of Paye's absence from 1948 to 1956, and André Feaugas played a prominent role in the intense debates that took place in Morocco and within the extensive networks of the CHEAM think-tank headed by Robert Montagne. Between 1940 and 1950 Feaugas was posted in the mountain tribes of the Middle Atlas as an AI officer and commander of native *goum* or Tabor units, and in that respect he had a close knowledge of Berber society that was equal, if not superior, to that of the professional ethnologist Servier.[30] This background is of considerable interest since it throws light on the ideas that informed the approach that he and Servier brought to the 'reconquest' of the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountain redoubts in 1957.

Between April 1947 and May 1950 Feaugas was AI administrator of the annexe of Ain Leuh, and in a series of papers that he presented as a student (*stagiaire*) at CHEAM during 1948 and 1949 he explained in detail how he had installed a new

[27] AOM 12CAB107, 'La réforme communale. Réalisations et perspectives', government circular, 12 January 1957.

[28] On this complex body of legislation, see C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 63–80, 137–50.

[29] G. Elgey, *La fin*, 161, 278–82, in the summer of 1956 Lucien Paye opened secret negotiations with the ALN, through the intermediary Roger Le Tourneux, an old friend from his Moroccan days and a specialist in Arab and Maghrebian politics. Parallel with this Paye prepared in great secrecy a draft statute that was intended to bring about an end to the war, but this was leaked to the press on 16 September and abandoned. AOM 12CAB201 includes numerous policy documents on the statute that Paye wrote for Lacoste and Mollet between August 1956 and February 1957. His proposals for reform built directly on the work of the 1946 PACs, but on 28 January 1957 Paye regretted that, 'The communal reform should have been undertaken in 1947' [underlined in original]; it would have been easy, but now the ALN had through the OPA seized on this initiative, and 'undermine our work in the *douars* and firmly establish their political organization'.

[30] On the *Affaires indigènes* (AI), see Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under Colonial Rule: French Administration of Tribal Areas 1912–1956* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 155–98.

djemâa assembly that had swept aside the power of the old, and corrupt, chief Amkor, who was typical of the 'feudal *caidat*' that had blocked the way to modernization of a backward, under-developed region.[31] The rejuvenation of the moribund *djemâa* at Ain Leuh released a burst of energy in which its members began to take the initiative in improving the village infrastructure, public transport, schooling, policing, and by proposals for electrification. Feaugas saw this modernization and apprenticeship in self-management and political autonomy as a process of building on the deep 'republican' traditions of Berber society. This was serving to block the penetration of urban-based Moroccan nationalism and the Istiqlal party, which he saw primarily as an ethnic Arab movement, into the Middle Atlas. Robert Montagne, impressed by Feaugas's presentations in Paris, visited Ain Leuh in 1948 to see for himself what he had achieved, and as director of CHEAM encouraged a far-reaching debate on a general *djemâa* reform movement in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria.

Under Montagne and Feaugas initiative several annual high-level conferences were organized by the Rabat government in the symbolic Berber heartland at Ain Leuh, that brought together AI officers, *contrôleurs civiles*, and other specialists from all over Morocco.[32] What is particularly interesting about the widening debate, and proliferation of CHEAM essays on reform of the *commune*, is the way in which a comparative approach to the *djemâa* in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, and the numerous local experiments reported by AI officers, generated an attempt to model new *commune* structures to match the extraordinary geographical complexity of local societies. What was emerging was the shaping of new local institutions to optimize political and economic development at the micro-level, strategies that were designed to halt and reverse the spread of anti-colonial movements and which, in the case of Algeria, were later to inspire the formulation of counterinsurgency methods. Montagne, in his emphasis on the 'infinitely varied landscapes' of *douar* society, argued in 1952 for the need to appoint in Morocco a commission of professors of geography and sociology, and experts in Islamic and Berber law, to oversee the investigation of the political landscape, and how best to shape organizations to the kaleidoscope of local societies. In this he was already pointing towards the role of experts, including ethnologists like Servier, in optimizing late colonial mapping and control of 'traditional' peasant organizations.

[31] Of six papers Feaugas presented at CHEAM in Paris, the four most important on communal reform were: *Le renouvea des Djemaas Berbères* (19 April 1948) [ANP 20000046/75]; *Transformation du village Berbère d'Ain Leuh en commune rurale* (26 April 1948) [APP 20000046/45]; *L'évolution du commandement chez les Berbères du Moyen-Atlas* (30 November 1949) [ANP 20000002/206]; and *Les jemaas administratives chez les Berbères du Moyen Atlas Marocain* (27 January 1955) [ANP 20000002/104].

[32] ANP 19960480/8, has an extensive file, including minutes, from the so-called '*journées berbères*' in Ain-Leuh on 26–31 May 1952, attended by some thirty officers and administrators. Among the discussion papers was a long, twenty-two page document, *La réforme des 'Jemaas'*, by Montagne. Ain Leuh had a central place in the debate on modern Berber tribalism: Feaugas's predecessor in the annexe, Jean Flye-Sainte-Marie, produced six CHEAM studies on the area during 1936–8.

Montagne and Feaugas, while insisting on the urgency of the *commune* reform to prevent a slide into anarchy and a final 'tragic convulsion', were still not prepared to hand over full power through local *djemâa* elections to the peasantry. Giving autonomy to the *djemâa* was a two-edged sword since, while it might achieve the desired effect of removing the dead hand of the feudal *caids*, it could also revive, claimed Montagne, the traditional dissidence '*siba*' or Berber resistance against central authority (*maghzen*), or, in other words, become a tool of anti-colonial movements like the Istiqlal. As with the PACs in 1946 (Chapter 5) elevation to a rural *commune* could only come about after a lengthy process during which the *djemâa* could demonstrate its ability to finance local government structures, equip the *douar*, especially with schools, and see the emergence of more progressive notables or 'a modern governing élite'.[33]

Feaugas claimed to have left the *djemâa* of Ain Leuh free to choose its own leaders, but this was not a democratic electoral process in the normal sense, but an adaptation of the traditional system of decision-making by group consensus and, in the case of appointment of the *caid*, the AI officer expected the *djemâa* to produce a list of three from which he would make the final selection. The conservative Montagne was concerned to undertake reform with caution, and not to destroy the old CM and *caidat* system too brutally, so in effect he sought to steer a middle path that would enable traditionalism and modernity to co-exist. In the difficult balancing act between patrimonialism and individualism, Montagne regarded the *djemâa* as a way to buttress the traditional forms of village solidarity against the dissolving forces of modernity. He, like many CHEAM participants, even began to explore the way in which '*djemâa ouvrier*' could be extended into industrial and mining centres in both the Maghreb and metropolitan France in which a proletariat of recent peasant origin ('*néo-citadin*') inhabited squalid *bidonvilles* and were sucked into subversive movements.[34] The *djemâa* thus represented a syndical corporatism of the kind nurtured under Vichy, and *commune* reform in the Chelif during the *Pilote* operation can be seen as part of a strategy to try and stabilize traditional peasant communities in the Dahra and Ouarsenis so that they would remain rooted in the mountains, be impervious to the siren call of communism and nationalism, and retain a social cohesion that would stop migration to France or the dangerous cities of the plain.[35]

[33] R. Montagne, *La réforme*.

[34] See Jean Cailliau, 'Les jemâa ouvrières du centre phosphatier de Khouribaqa' (1954), ANP 20000046/86.

[35] See N. MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants*, 187–8; Robert Montagne, 'L'émigration nord-africaine en France: son caractère familial et villageois', in *Eventail de l'histoire vivante: hommage à Lucien Fèbvre* (Paris: A. Colin, 1953), 1.365–71. The conservative colonialist discourse on the Algerian peasantry was in a direct line of descent from the classic Victorian ideology that sought an antidote to the dissolving forces of urban materialism, atheism, and socialism, by reconstructing a moral order based on face-to-face paternalism and the hierarchy of an aristocratic rural order.

When Lucien Paye became Director of Political Affairs to carry out the communal reform announced by Lacoste in the decree of 28 June 1956, he appointed Servier as a commissioner to draw up the boundaries of the new *communes* in northern Kabylie so that they would constitute meaningful economic units, with optimum population and social cohesion.[36]

However, the implementation of the communal reform ran quickly into serious difficulties. The old *commune mixte* system may have been antiquated, but to suddenly pension off the administrators and *caids* was to run the risk of dismantling rural government, no matter how inadequate, in the middle of a turbulent war and alienating state agents that could readily defect to the FLN. Colonel Schoen claimed that many new *communes* were unviable, too small or isolated, an opinion that was shared by Captain David Galula, commander of the *sous-quartier* of Aissa Mimoun. Galula had not been consulted on the four new *communes* that had been carved out of his zone by, 'a young French anthropologist well acquainted with the area and the Kabyles', but the new boundaries divided existing village communities, and formed units that were too poor in economic and human resources to operate efficiently.[37]

By October 1956 Paye and Goussault, in the light of the devastating *Oiseau bleu* fiasco, were beginning to question whether Kabylie had been a good choice as a region in which to test the new rural *communes* and COIN strategy. The French had long been drawn to Kabylie since they regarded Berber society and culture as particularly open and receptive to western modernity, and this was why the earliest *commune* reform had been introduced there in 1937. However, the very things that had brought Kabyles closer to modernization, higher literacy, commercial networks, and labour emigration to France had also opened the door to tracts, newspapers, trade unionism, and the intense sociability and political activism that was typical of larger village settlements. The lesson that Goussault drew from the failed COIN operations of late 1956 was that the counterinsurgency experiment should be located in a region in which the ALN was weakest, not strong, and where an initial purchase could be made more easily.

The attention of the government and military had already been drawn to the Ouarsenis and Dahra region in June 1956 with the dramatic elimination of the Red Maquis. The Maquis had aroused considerable excitement among top officers and officials, including Salan and Lacoste, since it seemed to confirm their Cold War ideological conviction that the FLN revolt was essentially a tool of international communism. The role of the 'tribal' *bachaga* Boualam in locating and

[36] C. Collot, *Les institutions*, 140–3, the task was carried out by *arrondissement* commissions.
AOM 12CAB201, correspondence between Paye and Servier, 17–18 September 1956, shows that Servier was officially designated *chargée en mission aux affaires politiques* based in the Prefecture of Tizi Ouzou. In *Adieu Djebels*, 112–14, Servier provides his usual caustic account of presenting his boundary proposals to a meeting of the prefect and CM administrators.

[37] D. Galula, *Pacification*, 145.

destroying the maquis provided strong evidence of the extent to which isolated mountain peasants, who were prepared to attack insurrectionary intruders on their terrain, could be cultivated as a 'third force' counter to the FLN. Finally the COIN specialists recognized, as had the communists, that the Chelif was a particularly important strategic corridor between eastern and western Algeria in which the ALN was thought to be weak.[38]

Lacoste demanded, as early as 10 July, an investigation of the situation in the Chelif, suggesting the possibility that this was an ideal spot to try an experiment since the FLN had not yet taken control of the region.[39] This helps to explain why Jean Servier, instead of returning to France after the *Oiseau bleu* fiasco, as is generally thought, was sent by Lucien Paye on an entirely new mission on 19 October to study the challenges faced by the communal reform programme in an area of dispersed habitation in the Chelif, the quadrilateral zone demarcated by Orleansville, Miliana, Ténès, and Cherchell, precisely the area chosen for the *Pilote* operation.[40]

Servier in the Chelif: The Collapse of the CM System

Although no report of Servier's mission to the Chelif in late 1956 has been found, we can reconstruct part of the process. This section looks in more detail at the way in which the rapid advance of well-armed and trained guerrilla units into the region brutally revealed the long-term, institutional failure of the *commune mixte* system and, in particular, the paralysis of the intelligence state. This was the reality that Servier would have witnessed, a situation in which the entire CM system of governance in the mountains of the Dahra and Ouarsenis had collapsed with extraordinary rapidity and even the gendarmes and army had lost all purchase and, at risk from ALN *katibas*, could only venture into the interior in daylight hours in large units. Servier's master plan for *Opération Pilote* was drawn up against this background and aimed to find a radical solution to the impasse.

The monthly reports of the CM administrators and sub-prefects during the course of 1956 reveal a sense of deepening paralysis, like watching a car-crash in slow motion, as the ALN *katibas* rapidly moved into the Chelif

[38] G. Elgey, *La fin*, 77, 93, Colonel Branet warned Lacoste on 12 March 1956 that the ALN advance was threatening the '*pourrissement*' of relatively quiet zones like the Dahra and Ouarsenis, and the dense European settlements in the Chelif valley.

[39] AOM 1K/1297, sub-prefect of Orleansville to the prefect of Algiers, 31 July 1956.

[40] AOM 1K/886, Vulpillières, deputy to the *Directeur général des affaires politiques* to the prefect of Algiers, 20 October 1956; copy of Servier's *Ordre de mission*, 19 October.

and seized control of the *douars*. The CM administrator of Ténès, for example, reported how between January and June 1956, apart from one minor 'terrorist' incident in April, the sawing through of six telegraph posts, there were no attacks of any kind.[41] But by August the 'phoney war' was over and rebel groups were moving about almost unimpeded, burning down farmhouses and corn-ricks, cutting telegraph posts, killing *caids*, field guards, and informers. The guerrillas were sufficiently well-armed and confident to mount attacks on SAS and army posts, and on the night of 20–1 August alone there were fourteen simultaneous but separate actions encompassing most of the *commune mixte*.

Most crippling for the intelligence state was the drying up of information as the links between administrators and fraction heads were cut: 'The terrorist actions on the population', it was reported from Ténès, 'can also be seen in relation to the fraction heads that either resign, or no longer come to see the *caid* or the officer of the SAS'. By September it was too dangerous for the colonial authorities to venture into the interior, except in heavily armed military units, and they had virtually lost control of the peasant masses. The administrator of Ténès painted a bleak picture: 'The most alarming symptoms—the resignation of fraction chiefs, a halt of all activity by these agents, the markets almost empty of people, the wine-growers inability to find workers for the grape harvest, the flight of the population before the pacification forces and abandonment of their houses and property, the withdrawal of the population into the most inaccessible zones—shows how significant is the grip that the terrorists exercise over the rural population.'

The SAS of Djelida in the eastern Chelif reported a similar situation in late December 1956, a virtual collapse of security as a large, well-armed ALN band operated with impunity, casually working its way through two *douars*, undisturbed by the army:

> On 27 December the Henry farm was sacked and burned, 1,200 trees (olive and fruit) chopped down, and the pigs shot and killed. The same day the bureau of the *caid* of Ouaguenay was burned to the ground, the civil registers destroyed and a hay-stack belonging to the *caid* burned. The same day in the *douar* Djelida the same band burned a barn containing agricultural equipment as well as three premises used as a dormitory and store, the hunting gun of the watchman was taken, and the personnel were mistreated. Still on the same day, the new school of Djelida was burned.[42]

[41] AOM 1K/692, monthly reports CM Ténès, 1956.

[42] AOM 4SAS74, weekly intelligence report by M. Perrin, deputy SAS of Djelida, 30 December 1956.

The Failure of Civil Defense and Evacuation of the Settlers

The collapse of French authority in the mountains was marked not only by the rapid suspension of all the normal activities of the colonial state, from policing to tax collection, but also by the evacuation of the European population, a humiliating retreat of the settler presence so that large zones of forest and mountain were virtually 'liberated' before the letter. From the end of the First World War the process of official colonization of the interior was already moribund and in retreat as growing numbers of *colons* farmers who had received official land allocations began to sell up and desert the harsh life of the *bled*, for a more comfortable and secure life in the towns. The arrival of the ALN *katibas* in mid-1956 simply accelerated a process of rural decline, and of growing pessimism among the few European farmers in the interior, who had long felt vulnerable and abandoned.

The protection of the isolated European population in the event of peasant insurgency, events like that at Margueritte in 1901 and the Sétif revolt of May 1945, had always presented an unresolved problem for the colonial government. Algiers did have a contingency plan for such an eventuality, a form of civil defense, under which farmers were advised to secure and arm their farmhouses, while, where possible, the population close to the centres could be evacuated into armed bunkers. During early 1957 a number of Algiers circulars to the prefecture of Orleansville set out the measures that were to be taken to ensure the 'Surface defense' or auto-defence of isolated farmhouses, which was to include grants for the defense works (barbed-wire, sandbags, etc.), the supply of hand-grenades and shotguns, and the grouping of farmers close enough into combat units.[43] The idea was for civilians, rather like Americans under Indian attack, to hold off the rebels long enough to enable time for the army to come to the rescue.

The insurmountable problem remained how to find a warning system so that farms under attack could rapidly call on army and fire-brigade forces to intervene. The ALN, proceeding any attack, would often cut the telephone lines so the authorities distributed a number of radio transmitters and trained *colons* militias in their use, but some of the equipment was mediocre or relied on electricity, that could also be cut off. The standard, fall-back position was to issue farmers with coloured flares or rockets, and the signals were picked up by army observation posts located in towers or on high ground.[44] This hit-and-miss system hardly filled the farmers with confidence, and troops often failed to arrive within the maximum

[43] Details of the auto-defense system are found in the regular minutes of the *État-major mixte* in Orleansville during January to April 1957: AOM 9140/175.

[44] M. Launay, *Paysans*, 141–2, text of a circular of the prefect of Oran to mayors and administrators, 25 July 1936, a system by which *colons* in danger could signal to spotter planes using white sheets positioned on the roof, or smoking fires in the courtyard.

time of one hour. A landowner named Paul Heim, for example, wrote to Lacoste to complain bitterly about the failure of the army in February 1957 to provide assistance although twenty rockets had been fired from his farm of Saint-Paul located a mere kilometre north of the outskirts of Orleansville.[45]

The economic life and morale on the scattered farms and small centres was further damaged by the incessant, and often deadly ALN ambushes, like that of 12 November 1956 west of Ténès, during which seventeen people were killed and the public transport MORY bus burned out. The army imposed regulations to cut back scrub and bushes for two hundred metres on each side of the roads, while the farmers could only travel, or receive supplies and dispatch harvest produce, in convoys defended by machine-gun units. Following the November ambush all public transport along the coast road west of Ténès was halted, and the CM administrator and the local deputy Bortolotti complained that the failure to resume public transport was a sign of weakness that assisted the FLN, while it had left three centres demoralized and without fresh food supplies for over a week.[46]

As the ALN terrorism deepened in late 1956 increasing numbers of *colons* opted, where possible, to flee to the towns or to France. An investigation by the intelligence service of the number of households that left the Department of Orleansville for France, Canada, and elsewhere between June 1956 and January 1958, counted 720 Europeans and Jews.[47] Although some departures would have taken place as normal, such as the planned retirement of civil servants, most were ascribed to the growing insecurity. A significant number of those departing were farmers, farm managers, or owners of shops and businesses in small rural centres. For example, three families left Carnot in late 1955. The landowner Raoul Junillion bought a hotel in Montpellier, but he continued to own a café in Carnot and had returned to sell 70 hectares of land; Lucien Siegwald had also gone to Montpellier, where he was a travelling salesman; and the *colon* Robert Freteur had rented a farm in Montargis. All three had kept property in Algeria, and Junillion was intending to wait for a clear outcome to the 'events' before making a definitive decision as to his final country of residence. Jean Siegwald, a *commerçant* and farmer at Les Attafs, left for Montpellier in March 1957 and left his property under the management of M. Guilbert. Some *colons* in the centre of Charon were talking about departure, but were unable to sell their land. Four wealthy wine producers in Rabelais had acquired businesses or farms in France,

[45] AOM 9140/152, Paul Heim, an influential farmer and president of the *Syndicat maraicher et fruitier d'Orleansville*, to Lacoste. Lt-Colonel Bruch wrote a tart letter in response to Hein's 'tendentious' attack on the army, and noted he had done nothing, although wealthy, to carry out auto-defense measures, and suspected he was angling to get an army unit permanently assigned.

[46] AOM 9140/69, administrator CM Ténès to prefect, 28 November 1956, Bortolloti to prefect, 20 December 1957.

[47] AOM 4i206, *renseignements généraux*, Orleansville, 4 January 1958.

thus '"exporting" several dozen millions'.[48] Clearly, where the rural *colons* had the means, they were taking precautionary measures quite early on in the war to move permanently to France or to transfer sufficient capital and to locate alternative farming or business ventures to enable a rapid transfer to the metropolis.

Small farmers confronted a far more difficult situation, in a number of respects, compared to wealthy Algerian and European landowners. Long before the insurrection, the majority of '*gros*' *colons* were absentee owners or rentiers residing in the towns whose estates were run by managers, so from 1956 they could devolve the dangerous task of running their farms on managers and labourers, while continuing to retain their profits.[49] The bigger and wealthier the estate the better the opportunities for the hiring of armed guards, in some instances ex-Legionnaires that earned 50,000 francs a month.[50] However, local government was concerned, probably in the light of the Sétif massacres of 1945, that the formation of private armed militias risked deteriorating into racist vigilante squads.[51] Wealthy estate owners, often leading politicians, had the influence to place pressure on the Algiers government and military for preferable protective treatment, including gaining the permanent location of army units on or close to their farms, or for armed protection during the harvest period.[52] The administration and security services appear to have prioritized the protection of those parts of the local economy that had a higher strategic or commercial value, such as the mines and big estates, over small *colons* producers that were more 'dispensable'.

The sense of abandonment by the small *colons* was particularly stark in the region of Paul Robert, west of Ténès. One landowner, René Rivière, who was consulted and dined by Lucien Paye in Algiers, wrote from Paul Robert on 26 July 1956 to defend the position of the 36,000 small *colons* across Algeria that lived amidst a million Algerians in the *communes mixtes*. This courageous, hard-working group, claimed Rivière, that shared the pain and joy of rural life with the peasants, and whose ancestors lay buried in the local cemeteries, represented the vanguard of French civilization in the *douars* and, more than the urban slickers and capitalist farmers and entrepreneurs, the 'feudal financiers' like

[48] Hartmut Elsenhans, *La guerre d'Algérie 1954–1962. La transition d'une France à une autre* (Paris: Publisud, 2000), 228–9, notes that the flight of private and 'invisible' capital from Algeria to France peaked in 1956, as did the *pieds-noirs* acquisition of land in southern France and flats in Paris.

[49] In the above case of Paul Heim, Lt-Colonel Bruch remarked that Heim lived in Orleansville, while his Saint-Paul farm was managed by Mr Blanchat. In contrast in October 1956 a small farmer M. Arnaud, near Ténès, mounted an all-night watch sharing shifts with his wife: AOM 9140/152, intelligence note.

[50] AOM 9140/175, minutes *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 20 April 1957.

[51] AOM 91/5Q/138, sub-prefect of Miliana to prefect, 17 August 1955, was alarmed that *colons*, who had never forgotten Margueritte or the Setif massacres, were forming their own *militias* that could readily move towards 'counter-terrorism, which is intolerable and dangerous'. Many *colons* signed a petition in favour of a project code-named '*Vigilaf*'.

[52] AOM 9140/175, *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 25 May 1957, '*Protection des moissons*'. In the rich grain lands of the Sersou troops protected the operations of 147 combine harvesters.

Borgeaud and Schiaffino were the life-blood of colonialism.[53] A month later, following a series of ALN attacks on farms, George Aigret resigned as municipal councillor of Paul Robert on the grounds that the Algiers government and security forces had failed to provide protection and the *colons* were not prepared to sit and wait to have their throat cut.[54] It would seem that the real losers in the rural civil war were not the big landowners, often held up by communist and nationalist propaganda as the main enemy, but the small *colons* that were trapped in the countryside, unable to sell their farms or to escape to the towns. By late 1956 the evacuation of the European population from the mountainous zones of the Chelif, while not striking a fatal blow at the global colonial economy, certainly inflicted massive damage on the morale of the Europeans whose identity was closely bound to the foundation myth of their pioneer ancestors, tough frontiersmen that had conquered and civilized rural Algeria.

Secret Negotiation and Protection Money

When the ALN guerrillas planned an attack on a particular farm it was rarely a random affair, but a process in which the farm was often selected because it belonged to powerful political figures, like the Saiah and Bisambiglia, who were members of the élite that supported French power. In other instances night-time raids by the ALN were planned by those that had direct experience working on the farm, and knew the layout, as well as the personal character of the owner and the history of his treatment of his employees. However, by late 1956 the FLN was increasingly prepared to enter into secret negotiations with landowners, to desist from attacks in exchange for a form of 'protection' money or the use of particular farms as ALN bases.

Initially big landowners were 'softened up' by the imposition of enormous economic damage on their estates. For example a farm of the powerful mayor of Orleansville, Bisambiglia, a deeply conservative figure, came under attack in October 1956 during which seven thousand orange trees and ten thousand vines were cut. In March 1957 the ALN returned to another Bisambiglia farm and killed the foreman.[55] Although landowners usually made insurance claims for such damage, repeated attacks began to wear down their resistance until they were prepared to enter into secret negotiation with the ALN.[56] As we have seen (Chapter 12), the same tactics were deployed to demoralize the Saiah clan through

[53] AOM 12CAB201, Paul Rivière to Lucien Paye, 25 July 1956.
[54] AOM 9140/175, George Aigret to prefect of Algiers, 23 August 1956.
[55] *L'Echo d'Alger*, 16 October 1956, 4 May 1957.
[56] There was a precedent for this in the *bechara* system where farmers, through intermediaries, agreed to pay 'bandits' for the return of stolen cattle. Farmers complained bitterly about the delays in gaining insurance money, a further cause of demoralization.

night-time raids that imposed heavy economic costs by cutting down stands of orange, olive, and eucalyptus trees, and setting fire to wheat fields, hay-ricks, tractors, and carts.[57] Eventually, the Saiah and Bisambiglia were forced to enter into negotiations with the PCA-FLN to hand over their farmhouses as guerrilla bases and to make considerable payments. In September 1956 Bisambiglia made a payment of nine millions, and he was followed by Mohamed Bouthiba (one and a half millions), Saiah-Saiah (four millions), Kaddour Bouthiba (one and a half millions), Bénaouda Bouthiba (one million), Mohamed Saiah (one million), Saiah Bouali (four million), and the Jewish community (sixteen million).[58] The fine arts of the double game can be illustrated by the farmers Georges Petit and Charles Giroud who paid money to the FLN but at the same time asked the ALN to carry out an attack on their farm, probably to conceal their complicity and to be able to make an insurance claim.[59]

As we have seen (Chapter 4) even the most conservative and pro-French of the *grandes familles*, like the powerful Saiah clan, retained a deep religious and cultural ambiguity towards western society that made them unreliable and unstable political partners of the French. This was compounded by the fact that the tired and aging elders of the *grandes familles* were ready to hand over their business affairs to the next generation, their lycée-educated sons and daughters, who were frequently ardent nationalists, and to seek security and repose in France, Switzerland, and Tunisia. The often cynical, self-interested behaviour of major political figures like Bisambiglia and Abdelkader Saiah as early as 1956–7, was indicative of the extent to which the colonial regime was disintegrating from within.

The Failure of Military *quadrillage*

A final aspect of the crisis in French security in the Chelif region in late 1956 relates to the failure of the arrival of a huge conscript army in June to hold or to reverse the ALN conquest of the Dahra and Ouarsenis. In mid-June the newly formed 9th Infantry Division, under General de Brebisson, arrived by troop ships and was rapidly deployed throughout the Chelif region. This injection of military man-power singularly failed to reverse the ALN advance into the mountains, in

[57] Attacks on Saiah property occurred on 11 and 15 June 1955, 10 January, 3 April, 9 August, and 25 September 1956; details from AOM 1K692 CM reports; 1K874, and 81F879, gendarmerie reports.

[58] AOM 91/1K 1186, intelligence report, 2e Bureau Algiers, 20 July 1957, interrogation of the money collector (*collecteur de fonds*) Sahraoui Bougharab ('Ouazani'). Further detail of such payments is in S. Kastell, *Le maquis*, 172. SHD 1H2536/2*, the OI, Captain Stien, 11 July 1957 reporting on the failure of *Opération Pilote* to clean out the old *pieds-noirs* establishment noted that Bisambiglia, 'the symbol of corruption, of shameful deals with the FLN and collaboration with the feudals [Saiah]', still remained in place as mayor.

[59] AOM 91/5Q/130, intelligence report of gendarmes of Duperré, 9 September 1957.

part because the poorly trained contingent were distributed throughout the plains as a protective force in a web of military posts, the system of *quadrillage*. While this provided adequate protection for the main centres of European population, economic activity, and communications, it proved singularly incapable of seizing the initiative in the mountains.

The SAS of Djelida reported in February 1957 that military operations in the mountains that consisted of classic, one-day sweep and search movements, had little impact and the ALN guerrilla continued, almost unimpeded, the work of destroying farms, schools, bridges, and the *caids* bureaux.[60] A frank, top-secret report of Colonel Darcy, commander in the sub-sector Nord (Dahra) noted that he had failed in his request to halt the evacuation of army posts located in the mountains. His command of four battalions was already overstretched to protect the plain, and the ongoing evacuation of mountain posts was, he claimed, an act of 'treason' towards those peasants that he had promised to protect, but which were now exposed to ALN revenge.[61]

Finally, the economic, social, and administrative collapse of colonial authority in the interior can be illustrated by the example of an important resin company based at Bou Caid. Between June 1956 and February 1957 M. Dupouy, director of the *Exploitation résinière de l'Ouarsenis* that employed some 350 men, European technicians and Algerian labourers, to tap pine resin in a vast forest concession, campaigned tirelessly to keep his company operating in the face of growing insecurity.[62] Through meetings with the prefect of Algiers, and in several detailed reports, Dupouy argued the case for an increase in military forces in the Ouarsenis to contain the ALN and to enable his company to continue its operations. Dupouy, who had first gained a concession in 1932 to exploit the state forests in the watershed of the Oued Fodda, claimed that the *Exploitation résinère*, in protecting the pine forests, had played a key role in arresting the massive erosion that was rapidly silting up the huge dam at Oued Fodda and posing a threat to the irrigation of farms in the Chelif valley.[63] Dupouy claimed that through his training of hundreds of resin-collectors he had formed a corps of specialist workers that represented 'a symbol of the French presence' which had served to maintain political calm in the mountains in the face of years of nationalist pressure. If he was forced to close his operations this valuable work force would be disbanded and the Ouarsenis region, 'the key to the prosperity of the Chelif', irreparably damaged.

[60] AOM 4SAS74, Djelida, 13 February 1957, to CM Braz.

[61] AOM 9140/69, Colonel Darcy to General de Brebisson, 1 December 1956. He asked for another two batallions.

[62] The file of correspondence on the Resin Company is at AOM 9140/152.

[63] On the ecological disaster of erosion, see Djilali Sari, *L'homme et l'érosion*. Dupouy noted that the Vichy state had contributed to the disaster by the massive clearing of oak forests during 1941–2 to provide a charcoal-gas substitute for petrol-driven vehicles.

To the chagrin of Dupouy neither the prefect of Orleansville nor General de Brebisson were prepared to listen, and stuck by the decision taken in June 1956 to evacuate all the forest guards that inhabited fortified posts in the Ouarsenis. De Brebisson wrote in January 1957 that a series of ambushes on the roads leading to Molière and Bou Caid had made the entire region insecure, and he simply did not have the troops available to man the isolated forest posts that Dupouy was demanding. Eventually, following a series of attacks on the company and its personnel, including the burning of forests and resin depots, and the assassination of Torres, the chief foreman, on 5 December, Dupouy was forced to close down operations and to evacuate his European staff to his processing factory at Hussein Dey near Algiers. Dupouy had not, however, given up, and he proposed that the army should restore security in the mountains by the creation of a *quadrillage* in which his resin labourers, who had an unprecedented knowledge of the forest environment, could be taken on as guides and informers to counter the ALN. By now the prefect of Orleansville was losing patience, and when Dupuy tried to travel up to Bou Caid to legally declare the forest a disaster zone, he was threatened with arrest and banned from the department.

The resin company affair illustrates the way in which the ALN *katibas* were able to gain control of the Ouarsenis forests, almost unimpeded, between July and December 1956, and both the civil and military authorities were powerless to retain an army presence in isolated posts that, with one exception, were closed down. Nor was Dupouy's argument that resin collection represented a vital economic and social function sufficient to persuade the authorities to invest more forces inside the mountains, so that the Ouarsenis was to all intents and purposes abandoned to the FLN.

The Servier Master Plan for *Opération Pilote*

During his mission in late October or November 1956 to assess the Chelif region as a possible location for Paye's communal reform, Jean Servier would clearly have witnessed the abrupt collapse of the civil and military control of the mountainous interior.[64] To all intents and purposes the old *commune mixte* and *caidal* system had hit the buffers. Historians have not always recognized the extent to which the French army, towards September 1956, was facing the danger of defeat in Algeria.

[64] Jean Servier and *Opération Pilote* has been examined by historians from a number of angles, but none places the project in relation to Lucien Paye, Lacoste, and communal reform; see Yves Courrièr, *La guerre d'Algérie*, 3.23–33; Jacques Cantier, 'L'ethnologue et les savoirs autochtones: Jean Servier et les Berbères d'Algérie, étude de cas', in *Outre mers, revue d'histoire* (2006); Fabien Sacriste, 'Jean Servier et l'Opération "Pilote" dans l'Orléansvillois (1957–1958): tentative d'application politique d'un savoir ethnologique', *Cahiers de l'histoire immédiate* 34 (2008), 267–83; and Denis Leroux, 'Algérie 1957, l'opération Pilote: violence et illusions de la pacification', *Les temps modernes* 693–4 (2017), 146–59.

The rapid expansion of the ALN throughout the vast expanse of northern Algeria meant that the military were over-stretched and, while a degree of security was achieved in the towns and plains through *quadrillage*, it lacked the manpower and resources to 'reconquer' the mountains. It was at this critical juncture that the Algiers government recognized that it needed to find a radical solution to the military impasse and, under the new leadership of General Salan and psychological warfare specialists fresh from Indochina, were looking towards the doctrine of revolutionary warfare (DGR) to find an answer. Servier, a protégé of Colonel Goussault and Lucien Paye, was well-placed to pick up on this rapidly evolving initiative, and seized the opportunity of his Chelif mission to sketch out a master plan that would seek a solution to the crisis through a massive COIN experiment that would be tested out in the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains.

In his autobiographical *Adieu Djebels*, Servier provided a rather fanciful and misleading account of how he came to find inspiration for what became *Opération Pilote*.[65] Just before Christmas 1956 he was reading a newspaper in the Paris metro, when his eyes fell on a brief report of how peasants of the *douar* Bou Maad in the Dahra had killed two FLN money collectors with axes and sticks, and handed another two over to the gendarmes.[66] Servier, who knew the impoverished mountain people of Bou Maad from his fieldwork in 1949–50, concluded that the revolt in Algeria was *not* caused by the neglect and poverty of the peasants, 'a revolt of the famished', since the primitive people of Bou Maad, one of the most isolated and archaic societies in Algeria, had remained loyal to France, while the 'Kabyles stuffed with, and drunk on, democracy, electricity, schools and running water' constituted the key bastion of the FLN. Servier's claim was that the most backward peasants, living in dispersed settlements, a kind of pure Rousseauist savage as yet unaffected by a corrupting modernity, provided the potential for a mass resistance to the FLN in the very heart of the rebel mountain zones. What was required was a form of rapid intervention that could reach into the *douars* to shape or guide that potential through the organization of self-governing communes, '*djemâas amies*', that would enable the peasants to manage their own institutions and auto-defense militias to combat the ALN. Inspired by his vision Servier recounts how at Christmas 1956 he flew immediately to Algiers, and submitted his plan to the General Government.

In his self-serving account in *Adieu Djebels* Servier makes no mention of the fact that he had been sent in October, under the aegis of Colonel Goussault, on a

[65] Servier's *Dans l'Aurès* and *Adieu Djebels* can be placed within the genre of heroic and romantic colonial adventure, of which his thesis supervisor Marcel Griaule was a master exponent. On this literature, see Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[66] Jean Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 145. Servier's adventurous books remain in general devoid of dates, locations, proper names, and other details, partly perhaps to evade the attention of the military censors. The event he refers to here undoubtedly occurred on 29–30 August 1956 ; see Chapter 11, p. 229, n. 5.

mission to study the implications of a COIN experiment in the Chelif region during which he would have been made fully aware of the anti-ALN movement in Bou Maad and visited the *douar*. Servier's suggestion that the '*Pilote*' project was invented by himself in a Eureka moment on the Paris metro obscures the fact that this initiative was the work of powerful players and interests and he would not have gained access to top level decision-makers to table such a proposal without their backing. Servier, far from being the sole inventor of the *Pilote* project, was being used as a pawn or instrument of the 5th Bureau, which was engaged in a political battle inside the Algiers General Gouvernment to push through a radical form of counterinsurgency against the opposition of conservative mandarins. To understand the genesis of Servier's master plan we need to interpret it more as an expression of the agenda of Colonel Goussault and the 5th Bureau than the inspired vision of the ethnologist.

Servier's plan, a surprisingly sketchy and brief eight-page document titled a *Constitution d'une organisation politique de base*,[67] was introduced into the General Government with the assistance of Goussault and General Salan, but ran into severe opposition when Servier was grilled before a meeting of senior civil servants or heads of department on 11 January, among them Colonel Schoen of the SLNA who, apoplectic with rage, said these were issues for 'specialists' and that it was unthinkable to confide such a task to just any crank (*hurluberlus*).[68] A note of the *Bureau psychologique* recorded the opposition of the *Directeurs des grands services*: 'the Political services were somewhat "shocked!" by the system that was adopted that obviously goes against everything that they have done for years and against everything that they have learned.'[69] Fearing that the mandarins would sabotage his plan, Servier asked Goussault to intercede via General Salan with the minister Lacoste, which was achieved since *Pilote* was given the green light two days later. The internal split in the central government, although rather opaque, reflected a crucial watershed, the moment at which the last defenders of the ideology and traditional methods of the *Affaires indigènes* and the CM-*caid* system were defeated by Lucien Paye and Colonel Goussault's agenda for communal reform and *Opération Pilote*. In May 1959, after leaving office, Schoen wrote a long, bitter letter to Paye in which he attacked him for the damaging communal reform project of 1945–8 and its revival in 1956–7 which saw the rapid creation of 1,100 badly planned, unviable *communes*, the elimination of experienced CM administrators, and their replacement by untrained SAS officers.

[67] SHD 1H2536/1. This brief document, without date and unsigned, is in Servier's inimitable bad typing.

[68] J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 153–6, fails to identify the civil servants present but the key opposition came from a shadowy figure, described as 'one of my eminent colleagues, a distinguished Islamic specialist', almost certainly Schoen.

[69] SHD 1H2536/1, note of the *Bureau psychologique*, 15 January 1957.

'Their suppression [of the CM] broke the administrative framework. . . . The old establishment [*la vieille maison*] was handed over to the demolishers.'[70]

The initiation of *Opération Pilote* in mid-January 1957 needs to be understood within the wider context of one of the most extraordinary, pivotal moments of the Algerian War. When Salan arrived in Algiers as Commander-in-Chief on 2 December he brought with him, or promoted, a cohort of his closest advisers from Vietnam, advocates of radical counterinsurgency doctrines that rapidly displaced the older, conventional commanders and the 'old-school' administrators of the General Government. This was a time of extreme turbulence in Algiers. In December General Faure was planning a military coup to remove Lacoste; the assassination of the conservative leader Amédée Froger on 28 December was followed by European lynching and murder of Algerians; on 7 January Lacoste handed over police powers to Massu and the parachute division; on 16 January Salan was the object of a failed bazooka assassination by 'ultras', and the army launched the massive repressive operations known as the 'Battle of Algiers', to defeat the FLN General Strike planned for 28 January. This period, as depicted in Gillo Pontecorvo's influential film *The Battle of Algiers*, has attracted enormous attention from historians and more recently by the US military and has been analysed as a defining moment in the development of new forms of anti-terrorist and urban counterinsurgency.

The fact that Salan, Goussault, and Lacoste devoted part of their time to launch *Pilote* at this moment of crisis and intense pressure confirms the importance of the operation and that urban COIN could not be treated in isolation, but was integrally linked to a global strategy that recognized the interrelationship of guerrilla activity in both the town and the surrounding countryside, a dual, linked space.[71] As we will see later, the *Pilote* operation in the Chelif would seek to stifle the mountain-based guerrilla forces by crushing their supply links to the FLN urban networks.

Servier's *Constitution d'une organisation politique de base* of January 1957 listed four criteria for the selection of a suitable region in which to carry out the *Pilote* experiment: that it should have 'dispersed housing making it difficult for the FLN to control the population'; a zone in which the ALN still had a weak presence so that French intervention could take place before the organization had time to take root; a region of illiterate peasants that had not yet been infected by subversive

[70] Maurice Faivre, 'Le colonel Paul Schoen'.

[71] General Massu, *La vraie bataille d'Alger* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1997; 1st edn 1971), 259–70, ch. 18, section, 'Pourquoi a-t-il fallu vous battre hors d'Alger?'. Massu set out in the spring of 1957 to cut supply routes between Algiers and the neighbouring mountainous zones of Kabylia and the Blida Atlas through operation 'NK 3', a code for a second-phase extension of *Opération Pilote*. It is significant that within a week of his arrival in Algeria as Commander-in-Chief Salan made his first tour of inspection out from Algiers on 10 December by a circuit through the Chelif region, a reflection of the shift among senior strategists from an interest in Kabylia to the Orleansvillois: Raoul Salan, *Mémoires*, Vol. 3: *Fin d'un empire* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1972), 69–71.

nationalist propaganda; and a population that had shown signs of hostility to the FLN. Of the four criteria, the reference to dispersed settlement, a key geo-political characteristic of the Chelif region, was the most significant. The *Oiseau bleu* failure had brought home the extent to which Kabylia, which had so engrossed ethnologists since the nineteenth century, was an exceptional region, and there was a danger in assuming that any COIN operations tested in the area could serve as a template for rest of Algeria. As Servier pointed out in his plan for the *Pilote* project, COIN operatives needed to recognize that, 'the regions of dispersed housing represent nine-tenths of Algeria', and the Chelif experiment would thus carry major lessons for a later extension into the rest of the Tell.

Servier's master plan argued that the choice of a region of dispersed settlement was strategically advantageous to the French since, in the absence of nuclear village centres, it made FLN control of scattered populations difficult: it was impossible 'to secure a permanent political structure', and to 'establish its usual system of denunciation'. The mountain regions, devoid of villages, were 'zones of circulation where the FLN bands could be easily tracked if the armed forces can benefit from the cooperation of the population'.[72] Goussault fully backed this logic, but therein lay an odd contradiction since Lucien Paye and other senior officials had known since at least the 1946 PACs that population dispersal presented a formidable problem for communal reform and *aménagement*, and would make government organization of the *djemâas* extremely difficult.[73] In the long term Goussault and Servier would be shown to have made a crucial error, since the dispersed habitat that they assumed would make ALN political organization so difficult proved to present an even bigger headache for the French forces, who eventually resorted to the drastic policy of evacuating the entire peasant society from the mountains.[74]

Servier's second criteria for the selection of a region suitable for the *Pilote* operation, that the FLN should have as yet failed to establish a strong base, is equally puzzling. Servier would have known full well from his mission into the Chelif in late 1956 that, as we have seen above, the ALN had already become dominant in the Dahra and Ouarsenis. Lacoste had, as early as 10 July 1956,

[72] SHD 1H2536/1.

[73] This may explain why Servier seems to have hedged his bets by initially suggesting that the region of Sétif provided an alternative to the Chelif. But Goussault, SHD 1H2536/1, *Bureau psychologique* note on Servier [Goussault], 28 June 1957, held this up as an indication of Servier's poor judgement, and claimed that Servier had wished in April 1957 to abandon the Chelif for the Sétifois, where, Goussault noted, there existed an 'extremely concentrated' habitat, a deep historic penetration (*pourrissement*) of nationalism, and a developed educational system that facilitated the spread of a 'subversive press'. Servier had only acceded to the Chelif choice under pressure from the military authorities. D. Galula, *Pacification*, 66; Goussault told Galula in January 1957, 'I have convinced Salan to select the Orleansville Zone as a test area. We will make a special military effort there.'

[74] D. Galula, *Pacification*, 280, argued the very opposite to Goussault, that it was best to select for pacification an area where the population was most dense, while 'the more rustic and autarkic the local economy, the less well can we operate'.

expressed interest in the Chelif as a location for COIN operations, but the sub-prefect of Orleansville wrote soon after that the region was no longer 'pacified', as the minister believed, and 'no longer seems to be a suitable place to test the experiment'.[75] This was also to play havoc with the *Pilote* operations during 1957 since the military, instead of walking into a quiet mountain zone, found themselves confronted with a well-embedded and heavily armed guerrilla force. Servier's plan, instead of being based on a close study of conditions in the Chelif region, appears to have reflected what he thought Goussault and others wished to hear.

Servier's *Constitution d'une organisation* went on to provide an outline of a future strategy, a sketch that would later prove difficult for army commanders to put into practice. It presented a classic statement or summary of the current doctrine of revolutionary warfare. Winning the conflict and achieving 'pacification' could not, Servier remarked, be achieved through military operations alone, especially as the FLN avoided conventional 'front' battles, constantly melted away before superior mechanized forces, replaced their dead by an endless supply of new recruits, and was succeeding in winning a war of attrition by tying down and exhausting the French forces. The FLN could not make the transition to the final phase of a full military victory, as had happened in Vietnam, but aimed to gain a political victory by winning over the population and any future elections. For France such elections were unavoidable in order to win over international opinion, but the French would have to find a way to prevent an inevitable FLN victory in any ballot. The FLN was, however, vulnerable since, while it might look like a Chinese-style movement of revolutionary peasants, in reality it was a communist-inspired organization led, like the Neo-Destour in Tunisia, by a small minority of urban-based militants, 'a movement of petits bourgeois intellectuals that had no deep ties to the peasant masses: a mass that was passive, resigned, politically illiterate, and which can be easily led and duped'.

To this point Servier provided a resumé of the standard position repeated by the military and politicians at the time, including what proved to be the fatally flawed perception that the great mass of Algerians were apolitical, had no interest in a nationalist, liberation agenda, and were simply cowed by a small number of FLN terrorists. What was new in *Opération Pilote*, and appealed to Lacoste and his aids, was the proposal for an organization that would enable the French to win elections that would, otherwise, inevitably fall to the FLN. On the surface it seems strange that Lacoste should ever have provided such full and rapid backing for a sketch-plan promoted by such a minor figure as Jean Servier. The answer to this can be found in the extent to which *Pilote* offered the minister an escape route from the

[75] AOM 1K/1297, sub-prefect of Orleansville to the prefect of Algiers, 31 July 1956. This clearly suggests that the idea for a COIN experiment in the Chelif was being contemplated as early as July 1956.

dilemma facing him, that his keystone communal reform was currently unworkable since the FLN was able to terrorize both European and Algerian participants.

Servier, as a commissioner for the creation of the new rural *communes*, had a detailed insider view of the problems faced by the reform that was the central plank of Paye and Lacoste's global political strategy. So urgent was this programme in the face of an impending UN vote on Algeria that Lacoste pushed through municipalization ahead of long-delayed future elections, so that the new *communes* were run by provisional village councils (*Délégations spéciales*) that were appointed by prefects, or in many instances by a single administrator (*délégués spéciaux*), who in most cases was an SAS army officer.

While the Algiers government claimed by February 1957 that it had largely achieved the goal of a communal reform, it was fully aware that this was hollow, a façade that had been rapidly constructed to strengthen the French claim that 1,058 delegations had been installed, 93 per cent of the total of 1,132 rural *communes* that were planned for Algeria.[76] However, this was largely a paper reform, pushed through with enormous haste and the government knew that the foundations for the proposed elections were weak and vulnerable.[77] Lacoste was aware that he was living on borrowed time and that he would need to move quickly to give some substance to his reform package, or face an eventual disastrous electoral defeat.

The scale of the problem can be illustrated from the situation in the Chelif region. On 25 February the Algiers government asked the prefect of Orleansville to investigate several devastating reports on the situation in the *arrondissement* of Ténès. The interim SAS team that controlled the creation of new *communes* near Paul Robert, the reports claimed, was defective, composed of 'failures, alcoholics, various corrupted men', under a SAS officer who had no training, was totally lethargic, and had failed to make contact with some 90 per cent of the inhabitants of the *douars*.[78] The *douars* of Dahra and Ouled Abdallah were under FLN control, suffered from a total *pourrissement*, and it had been impossible to form a delegation since the only local Algerians that could take on the function 'had either had their throats cut by the rebels or had been sent to prison camps'. The municipality (CPE) of Paul Robert was to be replaced by a new special delegation composed of three Europeans and three Algerians, a list put together at speed by the SAS officer. The three *colons* delegates, the wealthiest wine growers, known for their 'ultra' sympathies, represented a seamless continuity with the old council, 'a team that constituted the very type of the old system, that had controlled for years the economic affairs of the village to the sole profit of the European minority, fiercely hostile in their inner conscience, despite some protestations of liberalism,

[76] AOM 12CAB37, *Mise en place de la réforme communale*, 1 February 1957.

[77] D. Galula, *Pacification*, 145, noted how considerable pressure was exerted from Algiers to complete the reform by 1 February, later extended to 1 March.

[78] AOM 12CAB37, *directeur-adjoint cabinet civil*, Pierre Hosteing to prefect of Orleansville, 25 February 1957.

towards the rights and duties of all, and incapable of taking on board and applying a reform of this kind'.[79] The three Algerians selected for the delegation had no status in the village, one had been slapped by one of the *colon* delegates, and another insulted by the racist terms '*raton*' or '*bicot*'. It was inconceivable, claimed the report, that the European delegates would agree to sit alongside their former agricultural workers, or that they could be 'compelled to sit as equals alongside the men that they had always despised and humiliated'. Here, as elsewhere, the reform, instead of sweeping away the racist *colons* that had exploited Algerian labour and blocked any attempt at modernization of rural society, was tending to bring back the same interests under a different dress.

But, in some ways even more damaging was the inability of reform to gain support from the better educated and more dynamic peasants. Evidence of the intractable problem facing the government in late 1956 can be illustrated by the situation in the *douars* near Duperré. On 3 November 1956 the administrator of the *commune mixte* of Braz instructed the head of the SAS in Duperré to provide him urgently with a list of names of those Algerians who could be appointed to the new special delegations for five *douars*.[80] On 13 November the CM administrator called in numerous men from the *douars*, selected from a list of *djemâa* presidents and fraction heads, for an interview as potential delegation candidates. Many failed to attend, giving various excuses from ill health to attendance at a funeral, while others simply refused, despite the considerable and feared power of the administrator, and pleaded old age, ill health, or work commitments. The administrator knew perfectly well that the real reason for their reticence was fear of the FLN: a field guard and an Italian mason had been kidnapped in the previous week, and 'the terror', he noted, 'is very real and deep'.[81]

Even if those selected had agreed to head the new special delegations they were hardly equipped to lead a dynamic reforming agenda. Both those short-listed for the *douar* Bou Rached were illiterate, and one spoke no French at all. The administrator could not even be sure of the loyalty of some of the candidates that he had listed, as in the *douar* Ouaguenay where he chose the uncle of the *caid*, from 'a rich and influential family of which many were more than suspect'.

In January the same SAS officer, under intense pressure from the administration that was determined to complete the reform, returned to the charge and called in for a second interview all those that had been contacted in November. But now the situation had deteriorated even further, and most failed even to reply to the invitation. The administration was even reduced to interviewing two ex-*caids*, men of the ancien regime, to head new delegations, both of whom refused.

[79] AOM 12CAB37, report from Paul-Robert, January 1957 [author unknown].

[80] AOM 4SAS73, reply of the SAS officer in Duperré, 5 November 1956. The five *douars* were those of Zeddine, Bou Rached, Ouaguenay, Djelida, and Ahl El Oued.

[81] AOM 4SAS73, administrator CM Braz to sub-prefect of Miliana, 13 November 1956.

The SAS officer concluded that an increase in FLN activity over the two previous months had made it even more difficult to persuade notables to fulfil their duty to the 'public cause'. This dereliction of duty included the Europeans, 'who in the tragic circumstances through which Algeria is passing, had no sense of duty or a sufficiently developed awareness to defend, during a time of troubles, the collective interest as much as their own affairs'.[82] Despite all his best efforts over a three-month period the SAS officer had got nowhere.

The main purpose of Servier's proposal in *Opération Pilote* was to find a solution to this impasse. The colonial government could not go into open elections, which it would inevitably lose, but must itself engage in an offensive politicization of the rural masses through the implantation of a clandestine communal organization, sometimes referred to as the '*djemâa amie*'. Secrecy was essential since the ALN, which viewed the delegations as a direct threat to the OPA, mounted a formidable terror campaign in which SAS officers and volunteers for the new *communes* were subjected to threats and assassination.[83] Servier's solution was a two-phase reconquest of the mountain populations: intense military operations would first drive the ALN forces from carefully selected zones, providing a shield from terrorist operations behind which propaganda teams could move in and set up schools, clinics, women's groups, agrarian reform, and auto-defence units.

In his design for local *djemâa* assemblies Servier was able to draw on his extensive fieldwork as an ethnologist between 1949 and 1956, but he would also have been fully aware of the intense debate on the rural *commune*, to which his key military assistant André Feaugas had been a major contributor. In addition, intelligence officers had built up a detailed picture of the ALN *nizam* (OPA) from captured documents and interrogations, and Servier's organization was closely modelled on the *kasma* cells. The *Pilote* project reflected, or was attuned to, the underlying reality of peasant socio-political organization, in particular that of the integrated universe of the patrimonial, extended family and the fraction, but was based as much on the accumulated 'ethnological' knowledge of native affairs officers and of guerrilla forces as on that of Servier's own fieldwork.

In Servier's proposal each fraction was to have its own *djemâa* assembly with a political and military officer who would represent it in the larger *douar* assembly. In a bow to Lacheroy, each village cell would also have parallel hierarchies, in the form of sub-committees for women, youths, and war veterans. Each village would have a small unit armed with shotguns that would eventually form the basis of a properly trained *harki* unit, named the *Forces algériennes libres* (FAL), under a European officer, that could in time relieve the costly, over-extended French army.

[82] AOM 4SAS73, SAS Djelida (Duperré), 11 January 1957.

[83] M. Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis*, 91–2, 96–7; over two hundred Algerians were assassinated for standing as delegates.

Finally, and the lynchpin of the system, was a political commissar who would be carefully selected by the French military and sent for three months to a top-secret training camp where they would be indoctrinated into their future function as *douar* leaders. Once they had been reinserted back into the village they would, just like the ALN commissars, inspect and control the fraction and *douar djemâas*, design propaganda, liaise with their controllers in the military, and prepare the ground for future elections in which they could stand as candidates.[84]

Significantly, Lacoste's prime interest in *Opération Pilote*, to which I return, was the proposal to train selected Algerian agents to replicate the political commissars of the FLN.[85] Lieutenant-Colonel Feaugas, who was present at the meeting that finalized operational details for *Pilote* on 15 January, minuted that Lucien Paye's office, the *Direction des affaires politiques*, had backed the plan the main goal of which was stated in simple, but blunt, terms, to 'Form the Muslim political commissars that would oppose the political commissars of the FLN, in order to prepare elections favourable to *l'Algérie française*'.[86]

The Pilote plan contained very little that was new, but was rather a clever synthesis of a number of current themes or ideas that were being developed by Servier's superiors during the second half of 1956, including Lucien Paye's ideas on the 'emancipation' of Muslim women.[87] Since the ethnologist was embedded in the special forces, had full access to intelligence reports, and was present at the highest-level joint meetings between civil and military authorities in Algiers and Tizi Ouzou, he was fully party to the intense debates over current COIN strategy. Servier was in an excellent position to keep his finger on the pulse of the ongoing debates taking place, to assess the changing balance of forces between the

[84] It seems highly likely that Servier borrowed this idea from Lt-Colonel Trinquier, a leading specialist in COIN strategy, who in October 1956 wrote to Salan to say that the lessons of Vietnam had remained to date largely ignored. In particular in Tonkin and Laos 'autochtonous agents' had been trained over a two-year period, propagandists who had taken on a leadership role. It would be easy to recruit such agents among Algerian migrant workers in France, and after a short course in a special school, they could be 'injected' secretly back into Algeria to form 'the base elements. . . . These agents that we could infiltrate could in addition, in the event of elections, become our electoral agents and perhaps our candidates'; R. Salan, *Mémoires*, 3.48–51, Trinquier to Salan, *c.*October 1956. The idea was also known, and approved, by General Massu. The proposal was eventually implemented during 1960 by the creation of the secret 'third force' pseudo-party, the *Front algérien d'action démocratique* (FAAD).

[85] AOM 12CAB237*, Robert Lacoste, *note de service*, 11 February 1957 ; Servier's remit was to 'oversee the civic education provided in the special camps and the insertion and organization of the leaders shaped in this way'.

[86] SHD 1H2536/1, Feaugas, '*stage de formation*', 16 January 1957. Servier was officially signed on at the same meeting as *Conseiller politique en matière d'action psychologique* and head of the *Opération Pilote*.

[87] See N. MacMaster, *Burning the Veil*, 78–98. Paye, in a *note d'orientation au sujet du statut de la femme musulmane*, CAOM 12CAB201, proposed 'bold reforms that would shatter the framework of the old way of life, the better to adapt it as quickly as possible to the rules of modern life', and suggested the creation of a law commission on the reform of Muslim family law, of which he was soon to become a member. On 12 August 1956 Servier had sent Lucien Paye a paper on the emancipation of Algerian women, *note sur le statut de la femme Kabyle* (CAOM 13CAB7) probably in the knowledge that his director was working on this question.

conservatives and the advocates of *guerre révolutionnaire*, and to shape a project in which key decision-makers would find played back to them elements of their own thinking.[88]

Servier's proposal for *Opération Pilote* consisted of a brief sketch of only eight typed pages, but its implementation during the course of 1957 was to involve literally thousands of soldiers, counterinsurgency specialists, civil administrators in the prefecture of Orleansville, and senior commanders of different brigades or formations. Such a complex and innovative operation resulted in numerous problems, including tensions within the armed forces, and between military and civilian leaders, as to the definition, funding, and goals of such a sketchy plan. Inevitably the entire *Pilote* project began to undergo complex changes as it was implemented in the mountains of the Dahra and Ouarsenis. The final four chapters explore different aspects of this process and the way in which counter-insurgency doctrines were shaped by contact with the realities of peasant-based guerrilla movements.

[88] Goussault, who later fell out with Servier, wrote an aggrieved report in which he accused the ethnologist of simply appropriating ideas that the colonel had passed to him in the Paris *École supérieur de guerre* in the spring of 1956 (SHD 1H2536/1, *Bureau psychologique* note on Servier (Goussault), 28 June 1957); P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 461–9, 'Plan Allard ou Plan Servier?', note that the paternity of *Opération Pilote* was also claimed by General Allard.

17
Psychological Warfare and the Dahra Peasants

This chapter is concerned with the way in which Servier's initial plan, approved at various meetings in the General Government in mid-January 1957, was translated from paper into practice, and in particular how it impacted on the lives of the peasantry at the local level. The area selected for *Opération Pilote* was that of the new department of Orleansville under its prefect Chevrier,[1] and the matching military *Zone ouest algérois* (ZOA) commanded by General de Brebisson.[2] How Colonel Goussault and the 5th Bureau inserted *Pilote* 1 into the Chelif region requires some understanding of the complex civilian and military organizations that were already operating on the ground, and how adaptable they were to supporting or, at the least accommodating, the new *Pilote* team.

In early February 1957 Goussault inserted a special outpost (*Bureau psychologique avancé*) of the 5th Bureau, headed by Jean Servier and André Feaugas, in a villa in Orleansville. From this HQ the leaders commanded a small team of ten carefully selected *Officiers itinérants* (OI), whose task it was to travel to different brigades or army units scattered throughout the Zone (ZOA) to instruct them in propaganda techniques, and in the particular aims and methods of the *Pilote* experiment. Servier and Feaugas, who had privileged access to a helicopter, regularly flew on tours of inspection to monitor the overall project, as did occasionally Goussault and top-level generals from Algiers. Servier was given direct control of a large secret service fund of six hundred million francs, from which he paid for equipment, vehicles, arms, clothing, and wages, and which gave him a degree of autonomy from the conventional military.[3]

The outstanding characteristic of the *Pilote* unit that ran parallel to the normal army hierarchy, was the extent to which it was driven by a radical, ideological

[1] The department of Orleansville was created by the decree of 28 June 1956, and comprised the *arrondissements* of Orleansville, Miliana, Ténès, and Teniet el Haad, each under a sub-prefect. By a decree of 20 May 1957 this was extended by the addition of the new *arrondissements* of Cherchell and Duperré.

[2] SHD 1H2536/2*, a note recorded Chevrier and de Brebisson's call to a meeting in the General Government on 17 January 1957 to be informed of the *Pilote* experiment: 'These two authorities agreed to try the operation that had been outlined to them.' De Brebisson soon seized the opportunity to present a long shopping list for extra soldiers, specialist officers, and equipment.

[3] AOM 9140/47, file 'Fonds spéciaux. M. Servier', contains Servier's secret service accounts, including cheque books, from 2 February to 9 December 1957.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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agenda. In the small team of OI attached to *Pilote*, the most prominent and experienced were selected from the veterans of the Vietminh camps, including André Feaugas, Louis Stien, Jean Guyomar, André Bruges, Robert Auboin, and de la Croix-Vaulbois.[4] These officers, who saw themselves as revolutionary political commissars, were intent on bringing about a total psychological conversion, not only of the peasantry, but also of the armed forces and civilian, European population. Their self-image was that of modern-day crusaders engaged in the 'reconquest' of society and its liberation from the hands of the ALN 'fanatics', but also as agents of a moral rearmament that would save the French people from atheistic communism and the spiritual decay of mass-consumer society.[5]

The small 5th Bureau team in the Chelif, initially no more than about a dozen men, knew that the implementation of the *Pilote* initiative, especially in the *douars*, was dependent on the cooperation of hundreds of officers, and thousands of rank-and-file troops scattered in a *quadrillage* over the plains and mountains of the Zone. The first weeks of *Pilote* during February and March, before operations could commence after the harsh winter, were dedicated to psychological *action*, the intense training of both commanders and troops in the aims and methods of the experiment. However, despite constant orders from Lacoste and the Algier's *État-major* to implement *Pilote*, many officers in the Chelif showed little interest in the general aims of revolutionary warfare, failed to read the mass of literature and pamphlets distributed, stuck to routine, sought an easy life and derided the propaganda methods as ridiculous.

The OI Guyomar reported that although the troops were all informed about the principles of *guerre révolutionnaire*, 10 per cent were hostile to its application, 20 per cent sceptical or passive, 50 per cent remained unconvinced, while only 20 per cent were won over and effective. Opposition was even stronger among commanders than the rank-and-file, and 'the officers have never spurred on their subordinates'.[6] But what commanders particularly objected to was the intrusion of OI commissars into their units who acted as an élite corps that tried to force its radical agenda on experienced officers. Goussault received numerous complaints during 1957 that the OI treated commanders in an arrogant way, leading to 'bitter recriminations', and they had come to constitute 'a parallel hierarchy outside the

[4] Most of the OI had been captured at the battle of Cao Bang in 1950, and thus endured four years in the Vietminh camps; see Louis Stien, *Les soldats oubliés. De Cao Bang aux camps de rééducation du Viêt-Minh* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993); André Bruge, *Le poison rouge. La guerre psychologique. Guerre sans frontières* (Nice: Imprimerie Meyerbeer, 1969); Sylvie Thénault, 'D'Indochine en Algérie: la rééducation des prisonniers dans les camps de détention', in C.-H. Ageron (ed.), *La guerre d'Algérie au miroir des décolonisations françaises* (Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 2000), 235–49.

[5] Denis Leroux, 'Une armée révolutionnaire. La guerre d'Algérie du cinquième bureau', thesis in history, University of Paris 1, 2018.

[6] SHD, 1H2536/1. Guyomar, *bilan Opération 'Pilote'* (undated, *c.*July 1957); one OI Robert Auboin wrote to Goussault, 18 January 1957, to ask to be removed from the *Pilote* team since he did not think it could be effective and disagreed with the 'special political character' of the project.

normal hierarchy', and in reporting back to the higher command were even acting as 'spies' or informers.[7]

The French armed forces in Algeria, when viewed from top-down, appear to have been a highly cohesive and organized machine, with a well-oiled command structure bound together by the traditional discipline of the armed forces. However, as we move closer to the local level, the more we find a high degree of fragmentation, of overt tension between different army units, and of field commanders seeming to ignore instructions or acting in a surprisingly autonomous or erratic way. As Georgette Elgey remarks, 'The army of the IVth Republic did not constitute a homogenous corps, but rather a mosaic of diverse, incompatible elements'.[8] Despite instructions from Lacoste and Salan, *Opération Pilote* was implemented by a number of quite independent or semi-autonomous bodies, in which some leaders enthusiastically championed the experiment, while other, more conservative or lethargic commanders, objected to the initiative, engaged in passive resistance, and quietly sabotaged the enterprise. Added to this was a key problem of growing tension between the civil and military authorities over the aims of the exercise, and boundary disputes over authority as the army pressed constantly to assume unique powers, a goal that was finally to be realized with the military coup of 13 May 1958.[9]

Servier, Colonel Feaugas, and the OI in Orleansville constituted a relatively small and weak team in comparison to General de Brebisson, the commanders of the *secteurs*, and the large rank of specialist intelligence, communications, artillery, tank, medical, and logistics officers that crowded the *État-major* in Orleansville.[10] As the *Pilote* project developed during 1957, so inevitably it was constantly shaped by a large number of influential players, and this meant that the 'hearts and mind' strategy was subjected to a complex sequence of modifications, until Servier was forced from the scene and finally departed from Algeria for good in May 1958 to take up a teaching post at Montpellier University.

During January to early March there was an intense discussion in the military and civilian hierarchy in Algiers and Orleansville about the detailed

[7] SHD 1H2533, Goussault letters to OI, 11 March and 20 September 1957.

[8] G. Elgey, *La fin*, 195: she adds, what did an officer in the classic mould share with a militant of 'la guerre révolutionnaire?'. D. Galula, *Pacification*, 177, comments that the absence of a precise doctrine of pacification resulted in a 'mosaic pattern', in which each unit, 'merely reflected the personality of the local commander, his success or his failure'. This fragmented situation was to lend itself later to the proliferation of seditious army plots.

[9] Joint planning and liaison between the civilian and military authorities was initiated by the creation of a regular conference of the *État-major mixte* in Orleansville, but tensions remained high.

[10] For a biographical note on de Brebisson, see Michel Hardy, Hervé Lemoine, and Thierry Sarmant, *Pouvoir politique et autorité militaire en Algérie française. Hommes, textes, institutions 1945–1962* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2002), 281–3. There is much detailed information on the operations of the 9th Infantry Division in the Chelif region on the site <http://www.22eme-ri-tenes-1956-1962.over-blog.fr>.

planning of the *Pilote* 1 operation, as it was now called,[11] and eventually Salan as commander-in-chief in Algeria, and General Allard as commander of the Algiers region which included the ZOA, transmitted formal instructions to de Brebisson during 5–9 March.[12] Allard, who was the most influential 'ultra' theorist of psychological warfare, in addition to outlining the global aims of *Pilote*, to destroy and replace the military and political infrastructures of the FLN, specified the additional resources that would be made available to de Brebisson, including six batallions, helicopters, *Officiers itinérantes*, and medical teams.

The plan was not for *Pilote* 1, at least in its initial phase, to cover the entire ZOA, a vast, mountainous terrain, identical in area to the new department of Orleansville, but to focus on certain zones in the Dahra mountains where the FLN was weak and the population was judged to be 'politically favourable'.[13] The start of *Pilote* operations was delayed for two months by late winter conditions that made it almost impossible for army vehicles to penetrate the mountains along tracks that were turned into a quagmire or washed away, and by clouds that prevented air cover and helicopter transports. On the eve of the operations that finally started on 22 March de Brebisson issued his own secret instruction to his officers in which he emphasized the crucial importance of the experiment for France and the 'New Algeria': 'our goal is the liberation of the Muslim masses from the enterprise of terror and duress that the FLN imposes, from the poverty that has seriously worsened the situation, and to install a regime of peace and freedom linked to a new reinvigoration of the French Algerian community'.

A preparatory phase of psychological action, co-ordinated by Servier, Feaugas, and the *Officiers itinérants* during February and March, aimed to educate and convert the entire force to the key tenets and objectives of *Pilote* 1. This was to be followed by a sequence of carefully planned actions. The first phase involved an intense gathering of intelligence on the structure of the FLN organization in each target locality and identification of key individuals. Armed with this information, units were then to be deployed in a dramatic seek and destroy 'shock' operation to rapidly invest a target *douar* and to eliminate the ALN. With the area 'cleaned' and the inhabitants secure against terrorist threats, the task of reconstruction could begin during which propaganda teams indoctrinated the population, opened schools and medical centres, created jobs through road construction, and trained auto-defence forces that could guard the village against terrorist counter-attacks. Finally, the French could create a new administration, a '*djemâa amie*', modelled

[11] I have denoted the original *Pilote* project led by Servier as '*Pilote* 1', to distinquish it from the other *Pilote* projects that were quickly extended by Algiers into other regions.

[12] AOM 9140/78, Salan, *Directive générale* No. 6, 5 March; Allard to de Brébisson, directive No. 419, 9 March 1957.

[13] The Ouarsenis was largely excluded from *Pilote* 1 and handed over to special forces that, under conditions of great secrecy, controlled the neo-tribal forces of the *bachaga* Boualam and 'Kobus' (see Chapter 19).

on that of the OPA, that would eventually prepare the ground for an embryo municipality and free elections. Once a particular *douar* had been liberated and stabilized, with the creation of what Servier termed the 'foundation political organization', the inhabitants could begin to manage their own affairs and the military could then move on to repeat the operation in an adjacent *douar*. Quite rapidly the military could, in the classic Lyautey strategy of the oil-slick (*tache d'huile*) spread, to achieve the 'pacification' of whole regions.

The Battle for the Djebel Bissa

On paper Servier's initial plan for *Pilote* 1 had a disconcerting simplicity, but to see how this strategy worked on the ground we need to look at events at the level of the five sub-sectors (*sous-secteurs*) into which the ZOA was sub-divided. Each of these constituted an operational unit of two or more batallions under the orders of a colonel.[14] The sub-sector of Ténès, selected as a prime zone for the first *Pilote* operations that started on 22 March 1957, was commanded from an HQ in Ténès under Colonel Rieutord of the Twenty-Second Infantry Regiment (22nd.RI), the most dynamic and keen advocate of Servier's plan.[15] In late March Rieutord launched large-scale *Pilote* operations on two simultaneous fronts, the urban terrorist networks in Ténès, and the *douars* of Beni Haoua, Sinfita, and Taourira in the isolated mountain zone of the Djebel Bissa that was rapidly developing into a key zone of the ALN maquis (see Map 6, p. 272). As we have seen this was precisely the area in which the Communist Party had organized an early maquis and, despite the arrest of the Zitoufi clan in August 1956, many of the survivors of the 'Red Maquis' reinforced the newly emerging ALN.

The following analysis explores the way in which *Pilote* operations impacted on the mountain peasants through a case study of two quite different locations within the Ténès sub-sector. The first, the military post at the Breira Mine, emerged as the most successful attempt to assure sufficient and longer-lasting protection of the population, a precondition for creating a school, medical centre, and an embryo municipal government. The second case study is of a small community of five hundred peasants of the fraction Bouqraba that, while located only a few miles west from Breira as the bird flies, remained in an area controlled mainly by the ALN, but which was subjected to sporadic violent incursions and bombing by the French army.

[14] SHD 1H2536/1, *Fiche Bureau psychologique*, 4 May 1957 noted that, 'the sub-sector constituted the essential tactical formation for operations of the "*Pilote*" type'.

[15] SHD 1H2536, Colonel Rieutord to General de Brebisson, 24 January 1957, with app. *Fiche* 1, 'On the subject of an experiment in an enhanced military-psycho-political action in the sub-sector of Ténès'.

In 1956 a standard element of French military strategy was one of '*quadrillage*', the creation of a dense grid of small army posts that spanned the entire space of northern Algeria and made it increasingly difficult for the ALN to escape a tightening net of control.[16] One objective of *Pilote* 1 in the Bissa region was to extend *quadrillage* into the mountains by creating permanently manned posts,[17] made difficult by the absence of secure and reliable communications. Most of the access was by mule tracks and, as Rieutord signalled, one of the first priorities was for army engineers, deploying bulldozers, to blast a network of all-weather *pistes* to facilitate both rapid troop deployment and regular convoys to supply newly created posts.[18]

The Achilles heel of military counterinsurgency was the threat of an ALN ambush. Not even the major inter-town routes, like the coastal N11 from Ténès to Cherchell, or the N19 from Ténès to Orleansville, were secure and military and civilian traffic had to move in large convoys, protected by armed vehicles and spotter-plane cover from the air. The absence of secure road communication damaged economic activity and was another indirect 'cost' imposed by the ALN on the occupier. The steep and winding tracks that led up into the Djebel Bissa were frequently cut by ALN trenches, barriers of rocks and tree trunks, and mine fields, and were particularly exposed to ambush, as the army found to its cost on many occasions. On 28 February, a matter of weeks before the start of the first *Pilote* operation, a convoy of fifteen vehicles returning from the weekly supply of the isolated post at Bouyamène to the east of Bissa was decimated, with the loss of thirty-one dead, including a pilot, and thirteen wounded.[19] Most of the small posts in the *djebel* were vulnerable to attack, were regularly harassed by ALN bands at night, and were often so cut off by impassable, collapsed roads that supplies could only be delivered by helicopter or parachute drop, and in many instances posts had to be evacuated, especially as winter set in.

[16] On the *quadrillage* system, see Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 35–6. On daily life in the posts, nearly five thousand of which were constructed to safeguard strategic points, including mines, hydroelectric dams, mountain passes, and hilltop observation forts, see Jean-Charles Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie 1954–1962. Expériences contrastée des hommes du contingent* (Paris: Autrement, 2000), 192–220.

[17] SHD 1H2536/1, between 22 March and 1 July the *Pilote* 1 operation increased the number of posts from 18 to 64.

[18] *Pistes* construction was also used by the SAS and army as part of a public works programme to soak up mass unemployment, another plank in the hearts and minds agenda, and also as part of a system of prison labour deploying thousands of peasants held in local camps, or as a collective punishment imposed on recalcitrant villages.

[19] There are a considerable number of eyewitness accounts and photographs relating to this and other ambushes on <http://www.22eme-ri-tenes-1956-1962.over-blog.fr>, an unofficial but rich blog of the 22nd Infantry Regiment; see also Captain J. Assemat, 'Mars 1957: Opération Pilote!', *Historia Magazine* 299 (1972). The Bouyamène ambush was even more catastrophic than the notorious Palestro defeat of 18 May 1956 when the decimation of seventeen inexperienced conscripts generated an enormous media coverage; see Raphaëlle Branche, *L'Embuscade de Palestro. Algérie 1960* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010). The government went to some lengths to conceal the morale-damaging defeat at Bouyamène.

What set most of the Bissa mountains apart from the Breira mine was that the French army was only able to move into the area through large, combined operations but, after a few days, was forced to pull out before it could provide a more lasting presence and guarantee the security needed to reassure peasants and to set up new communities with schools, medical centres, and village halls. The military post at Breira, based in the well-established location of a working mine, had more secure communications and was better protected. It represented one of the very few instances where the army was able to create a larger, stable base inside the mountain zone. Although providing a much publicized model of 'pacification', Breira was exceptional, while the experience of Bouqraba was far more typical of the situation faced by most peasant communities.

The Breira Mine: A Showcase of Mountain 'Pacification'

The communist leaders Marouf and Fayet had since the 1930s organized the CGT union among the 'peasant-worker' miners of Breira, and this was revived after the Second World War with the assistance of the young communist militant Abdallah Mokarnia, who was elected head of the Beni Haoua *djemâa* in October 1947 and collaborated with Hadj Mohamed Zitoufi in the Peasant's Union (SPC). Although Zitoufi and his sons had been arrested in August 1956, a considerable number of communist militants of Beni Haoua merged into the ALN and were in the process of building a maquis, under the leadership of a 47-year-old farmer Djelloul Belhai, when he and numerous militants were arrested in September 1956.[20] Belhai, who carried significant influence among the local population, was described by the police as 'a very intelligent man, literate in Arabic, who is in high demand among his fellow Muslims for the help he can provide, is highly regarded by them, and enjoys a certain prestige. He has always been known for his nationalist ideas and, on every occasion, he denounces our institutions'. Two of the men arrested with him also exercised influence as heads of the fractions of Beni Bouaziza and Beni Abdeslem. Two members of the Achour family, Abdallah and Amar, played a key role through their general store which served as a meeting place and a safe-house for liaison agents, while they used their car to transport ALN supplies. Amar Achour was described as a 'propagandist who enjoyed a high level of prestige among the youths', and used his influence to recruit them into the maquis.[21] The group provided liaison agents and guides that maintained the cross-mountain web

[20] AOM 1K874, PRG sub-prefecture of Orleansville to head of RG, Algiers District, 17 September 1956. Belhai was one of the sixteen militants on Mokarnia's communist list when he won the *djemâa* election of Beni Haoua; see AOM 914/20, minutes of the election, 20 November 1947.

[21] The fourteen arrested men, of whom at least eight were ex-PCA, with an average age of 41.5 years were much older than most ALN militants, indicating a network of militants of long standing. Six were indicated as small farmers, six as labourers, mainly mine workers, and two as grocers.

of secure mule tracks, a vital network that transmitted messages and documents to and from Ténès in the west, and southwards to the *douars* of Beni Bou Mileuk, Tacheta, Sinfita, Beni Rached, and the Chelif valley.

The arrest of Belhai and his men struck a major blow against the ALN in Beni Haoua and helped to provide the secure conditions under which an army post could be established by the 6th company of the 22nd RI. Djelloul Belhai, who came from a relatively well-off farming family, shared a background that was similar to that of the ex-PPA leader and 'warlord' Djillali Belhadj ('Kobus') who had been secretly recruited as an informer during his imprisonment. Belhai, likewise was 'turned' by the intelligence services in prison and released on condition that he work with the French.[22] Belhai, who carried considerable influence in the *douar*, was now deployed by the 5th Bureau as a star speaker during the mass rallies at the Breira mine in June 1957.[23]

The psychological action team at Breira, led by Captain Portmann, brought into the mine all the elements of the strategy outlined by Servier in the *Pilote* master-plan, one based on the creation of four strands of action that would target, women, youths, war veterans, and the 'tribal' elders that had dominated the fraction *djemâas*. This programme, mainly co-ordinated and funded by the Servier Feaugas bureau in Orleansville, was able to draw on the services of three types of specialized, mobile units that daily toured through local markets and recently 'liberated' *douars*.

The *Compagnies de haut-parleurs et de tracts* (CHPT) were created in June 1956 as propaganda units, equipped with mobile cinemas, loud-speakers, photographic displays, and tracts that would typically set up stall on market day or when hundreds or even thousands of peasants were invited, or press-ganged, into attending huge outdoor rallies at which they were addressed by officers, prefects, and 'tribal' notables, and invited to chant specially designed slogans.[24] On 28 May a first elaborate ceremony took place at Breira during which an estimated five thousand peasants gathered to hear speeches from the commander Rieutord, the sub-prefet of Ténès, Martinod, and local notables like Belhai. This was followed

[22] Considerable secrecy surrounded Belhai's release, but in the blog <http://www.22eme-ri-tenes-1956-1962.over-blog.fr>, sub-lieutenant Paul Antikow, who was posted to the mine at this time, suggests that some form of secret deal had been made with Belhai, who continued to play a highly ambiguous role. The SAS officer at Francis Garnier, Edouard de Montalembert, *Souvenirs d'Algérie*, <http://www.miages-djebels.org/IMG/pdf//Souvenirs_d_Algerie_E_de_Montalembert.pdf>, distrusted Belhai, 'an old Muslim notable who defected to our side and must have been given a front, and has much influence among the courageous peasants. . . . So we play with fire.'

[23] P. Antikow blog includes photographs of the June 22 ralliement with Belhai at the microphone. Antikow notes that Belhai was critical of the extension of social security rights that encouraged a high birth rate, while he described the Algerian Assembly as 'an assembly of pigs who only think about getting fat'. This suggests the profile of an eccentric populist leader who, like Zitoufi, had initially been drawn to the nationalists as a middle peasant in disdain of the Algerian political élite.

[24] On the CHPT, see P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 387–8. The behaviourist psychology that underpinned these operations is discussed in Chapter 18.

two weeks later by an even grander ceremony attended by the prefect and General Renaud to mark the official '*ralliement*' of the *douar* to the French cause, and that was closed by an event that few hungry peasants could resist, a giant pit-grill *mechoui* at which forty sheep and a ton of couscous was consumed.[25]

The second strand of the *Pilote* action consisted of mobile teams of army doctors and nurses, the *Service d'aide médicale gratuite* (AMG), that, in the absence of medical provision in the *bled*, attracted enormous crowds of men, women, and children that queued to find relief for every kind of malady, from eye infections to stomach disorders. Rieutord, in his early response to the *Pilote* consultation, had highlighted the lack of healthcare as the single most important issue in the battle for hearts and minds: 'The current state of health in the *douars* is a veritable disaster', and the early spring of 1957 was threatening to see 'a hecatomb in mortality'.[26] In the Ténès sub-sector with a population of 115,000 inhabitants there were only four to five civilian doctors, and at least another forty were required. 'We need a veritable shock-brigade of medico-social commandos to carry out a deep and prolonged action, the only way that will work.' Four months into the *Pilote* operation the prefect Chevrier saw free medical aid as the most successful component of psychological action, and statistics of the number of consultations were used by the authorities to provide a key index through which to map the success of 'pacification' through time and space.[27]

Attached to the AMG was a third type of unit, the *Équipes medico-sociale itinérantes* (EMSI), that, in many ways, constituted the most innovative part of the Servier project. The female EMSI units were joint teams of Europeans and young Algerian volunteers, the *Adjointes sanitaires et sociales rurales auxiliaires* (ASSRA) who could act as interpreters and cultural intermediaries, to effect a process of modernization and female 'emancipation', and to subvert the FLN by breaking into the closely guarded private sphere of the family to collect intelligence.[28]

Perhaps because of the dangerous road access to Breira the military post did not depend on such mobile welfare units but set up a permanent socio-medical centre that was run by an army doctor and two welfare assistants, one of them a young Algerian woman. Portmann also set about the construction of a school, recruited the first men for a *harki* unit, planned to build new housing and a town hall to

[25] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier reports to Lacoste, *c.*14 June and 15 July 1957. Antikow remarked, 'the propaganda assemblies are seeing a bigger and bigger distribution of wheat, semolina, coffee, sugar, chocolate, biscuits, aprons for children. The theme according to which, "the rebels are incapable of doing as much" is, of course, used'.

[26] SHD 1H2536, Colonel Rieutord to General de Brebisson, 24 January 1957.

[27] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier report to Lacoste, 6 May 1957.

[28] See SDA 1H2536/1, 5th Bureau—*État-major* ZOA, *bilan de l'expérience 'Pilote' au 1er Juillet* 1957, on the importance of the EMSI, since it enabled 'the penetration of the family cell by acting on the Muslim woman whose evolution is a fundamental element of pacification'. I have explored these issues in *Burning the Veil*, 86–98.

serve the future commune of Breira, and opened a market to boost the economy.[29] The mine directors, who supported a strong military protection that enabled the mine to remain open, contributed some of the finances for the construction of the school for the medical centre that doubled up as occupational health units, and planned an apprenticeship school for miners. But the SAS officer de Montalembert detected in this a continuity with pre-war company paternalism, and the system by which *caids* and fraction heads increased their patronage powers by acting as recruitment agents for the company.[30]

It is difficult to assess the extent to which psychological actions, like that at Breira, achieved the intended goal of converting a recalcitrant or terrorized population into strong supporters of the French occupation and firm opponents of the ALN. Most of the reports by senior administrators and commanders in the ZOA to their superiors in Algiers provide glowing accounts of the success of the Breira experiment, a model of hearts and minds activity in the central mountains that served as a showcase and photo opportunity for generals, prefects, and ministers, and the attendant press corps, that were flown in by helicopter. However, even the prefect Chevrier, who enjoyed his visits to dozens of well-orchestrated official ceremonials of this kind, began to show some doubts towards the end of *Opération Pilote* as a willing suspension of disbelief began to fracture and give way to a deeply unsettling feeling that they were standing on quicksand.[31]

To assess the impact of psychological action it helps to make a distinction between two terms, *ralliement* and *regroupement*, that were often used in a confusing, interchangeable way. I reserve the term *ralliement* for those occasions when the rural population, while continuing to live in dispersed farmhouses, gathered in huge crowds to acknowledge French dominance. Quite different was the permanent movement of entire fractions, the process of *regroupement*, to be looked at later, by which many hundreds of men, women, and children, abandoned their farms and moved, usually down into the plain, to resettle in camps under the protective umbrella of the army.

At the Breira mine small numbers had regrouped to live alongside the military post, mainly the families of the *harkis* who, as elsewhere, sought protection, and for the French offered a guarantee, a form of 'hostage', that the auxiliary troops would not defect to the ALN. But the majority of the five thousand peasants that

[29] Portmann, son of the senator for the Gironde, Georges Portmann, was assassinated by the FLN on 5 August 1957 when they seized, to the great embarrassment of the 5th Bureau, documents relating to the secret programme for the training of agents at Arzew.

[30] Montalembert noted on 12 July that Belhai was intended as future mayor: 'all the powers will come to him, but he will be subserviant to the mine which will use him for his ability to employ or fire his subjects.'

[31] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, report on *Pilote*, 6 May 1957, of peasants that appeared easily influenced by psychological action teams, but: 'It only takes a passing rebel band to engage in a counter propaganda for the same population, whose fickleness is well known, to desert the markets, the SAS, the dispensaries, and to turn against us.'

had 'rallied' during the ceremonies of June 1957, many of them relatives of the 350 miners that travelled to the pit daily, had walked in to Breira from the surrounding mountains where they continued to live in dispersed *mechtas*, in zones where the ALN circulated with ease. Photographs of the Breira *ralliement* rituals show spectacular numbers of men, women, and children, but it is uncertain how many were there because they supported the French cause, as the generals and senior administrators liked to claim, or because they were drawn by the medical assistance and free food on offer, or, in a context of military repression and violence, they were reluctantly obeying the orders of the traditional headmen like Belhai, the ex-*caids* and *kebirs*, to turn out, or suffer the consequences.

The ALN, fully aware of the dangers posed by the Breira post lodged in the heart of the mountain zone, mounted a strong counter-attack. On 27 September the ALN attempted to dynamite the cable-car system that carried iron ore from the mine to the port, and harassed the post with shotgun fire as on the night of 2–3 October, but attempts to bring operations to a halt proved to be a double-edged sword. The ALN attempted to create a counter-state in which peasants would be radically isolated from the colonial administration, welfare, and commerce, but a boycott of European employment presented enormous difficulties for subsistence farmers who could barely survive. The contradictions in ALN policy became clear in Beni Haoua when it attempted to close the mine that played a vital role in the local economy and was a crucial source of wages for peasants.[32] Peasants could not understand the logic of the ALN demand that they should sabotage the transport cables, and the guerrillas were so rapidly losing their support base that the inexperienced political commissar of Beni Haoua had to be replaced by Abderrahmane Krimi in February 1957 to restore confidence.[33] The ALN solution in Breira was to take a more pragmatic, less doctrinaire position, as was the case elsewhere and in other areas of employment. For example, instead of opposing peasant recruitment into the public work gangs that repaired roads, thus indirectly assisting army movement into the mountains, the local ALN might tolerate this so as not to alienate starving peasants while at the same time making it possible to levy dues.

In the Breira camp where military occupation and the benefits of psychological action were at their most advanced in the mountain zone, the presence of crowds of many hundreds of peasant men, women, and children lined up to receive food, clothing, and medicine did not necessarily mean support for the French cause.

[32] SHD 1H2536/1, *fiche* 2, Opération '*Pilote*', sub-sector Ténès, 7 February 1957: 'The 350 mine workers recognize that the region lives off the mine and the annual wages of some 60,000,000, hence their reticence for sabotage of the installations. The [general] strike was easily broken.'

[33] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 69–71. A more nuanced position was not to enforce the permanent closure of the mine, but to demonstrate FLN power through short-term general strikes as it did on 5 July 1956, and again in January 1957, when miners obeyed a total stoppage for two days. The army reply, notes Antikow, was a counter 'demonstration of force' with a display of precision artillery that showed how easily the *gourbis* could destroyed.

Moreover, the army was not able to address its propaganda to mass meetings of villagers that inhabited dense settlements, but had to gather together or centralize populations for the occasion. The psychological warfare officers, in their organization of dispersed populations in this way, were dependent on the traditional mechanisms of the *commune mixte*, the system of indirect rule by the *caids* and fraction chiefs that they were in principle seeking to replace by a modern system of government.

Finally, it must be emphasized that well-established army posts like Breira located inside the mountain zones of the Dahra were exceptional and remained like islands or small enclaves within the vast expanse of the *bled* where military pacification was unable to make any enduring impact, as we see next for the neighbouring *douar* of Sinfita.[34]

Louis Kergoat: Peasant Life in the Djebel Bissa

Pilote operations, with the exception of one or two fixed bases like the Breira mine and Bou Maad, failed to achieve a uniform or stable 'pacification' of the mountainous interior. The situation in the Dahra throughout 1956 to 1958 was one of extraordinary instability, a constant ebb-and-flow of French and ALN forces, so that any one *douar* or location could 'change hands' repeatedly, not only from one week to the next, but also between day and night. To understand how peasants in the Djebel Bissa experienced this unstable and extremely dangerous situation, caught between a rock and a hard place of contending forces, we turn to the evidence of Louis Kergoat and the small community of worker priests of Bouqraba in the *douar* Sinfita, which provides a rare insight into life in the high mountains during this period (see Map 6, p. 272).

The *Petites frères de Jésus*, a small order founded by René Voillaume in 1933, followed the teachings of Charles de Foucault, a hermit who was assassinated by the Toureg in the Sahara in 1916. In 1945 the order rented a farm in the *douar* Sinfita high in the Djebel Bissa as a summer retreat from the searing heat of the desert.[35] In 1952 the farmhouse became a permanent settlement in which the two most prominent figures, Louis Kergoat ('Said') and Maurice ('Abd-er-Rahim'),

[34] Only one other post could compare with Breira, the much-publicized *douar* Bou Maad in the eastern Dahra, mythologized by Servier in *Adieu Djebels* as the inspiration for the entire *Pilote* experiment. This achieved major coverage in the national press; see Jean Pivert's five articles in *L'Aurore*, 26 June to 1 July 1957 on his eyewitness account of Bou Maad. General Dulac was furious that Servier had invited Pivert and revealed the existence of the secret operation; SHD 1H2536/2*, note of 28 June 1957. A propaganda film produced by the *Service de diffusion cinématographique de l'armée* (SCA) 'Le poste de Bou Maad' (1958), posted on Youtube, provides an excellent visual impression of the conditions in this showcase *douar*.

[35] Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916), canonized in 2005, shared the hardship of life among the Touareg, studied their Berber language, and inspired a number of leading scholars of Islam, among them Louis Massignon and Louis Gardet.

were witness to the process by which the isolated and tranquil peasant community was radically affected by the dramatic incursion of the ALN and French army after August 1956. Louis Kergoat's eyewitness account of life inside the peasant war-zone is of exceptional interest for a number of reasons.[36] The *Petites frères* shared in the radical worker-priest movement of the 1950s in which Catholics plunged into slums and factories, not to proselytize, but to participate directly in the work and housing conditions of dockers, miners, and migrants, as a living testament to the Christian faith.[37]

The *Petites frères* did not merely live among the peasants of the Bissa but shared in their economy in order to survive in what was an extremely harsh and difficult environment. Louis Kergoat cultivated barley, tended irrigated vegetable patches, ploughed with a mule, herded goats in the forest, hired out his labour to charcoal burners, repaired dirt tracks in public work gangs, and shared in communal house construction (*twiza*). He also learned Arabic and the Berber dialect of the region, tended the sick, helped locals with administrative paperwork, and in the long winter nights socialized with neighbours, who liked to congregate in the brotherhood to swap news and, often, to seek protection from French army units. Kergoat thus had an 'insider' knowledge of mountain Berber society that few ethnologists could aspire to and, since the *Frères* had, through the years, won the complete trust of the peasants, they were confided in by a normally secretive population, and shared their fears, just as a virtual civil war swept into the region.

As the Djebel Bissa region descended into full-scale warfare in August 1956 the *Petites frères* received full backing from their superior René Voillaume, as well as the archbishop of Algiers Léon Duval, to remain in the ALN controlled sector, as long as they maintained their neutrality and independence of both the Algerian and French sides as a Christian witness (*témoignage*). At the same time the senior ALN commanders that inhabited a HQ close by in early 1957, after a careful investigation and negotiation with the Brothers, gave them an exceptional permission to stay in the 'free zone' they controlled, provided them with protection, and developed a close friendship.[38] While the Brothers refused to provide direct

[36] The sources are particularly rich and consist of the community journal (*diaire*) and letters from that period, which Kergoat has drawn upon in his memoirs; see Louis Said Kergoat, *Frères contemplatifs*. See also Kergoat's two theses 'Paysannerie des djebels' (1969) and 'Paysan au Dahra Oriental' (1972), supervised by Germaine Tillion. On his close friendship with an ALN commander, see *Commandant Si Lakhdhar Bouchema 1931–1960. Armée de libération nationale (wilaya IV—Algérie)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010); author interview with Louis Kergoat, Paris, 14 June 2011.

[37] See Oscar L. Arnal, *Priests in Working-class Blue: The History of the Worker-Priests (1943–1954)* (New York: Paulist Press, *c.*1986). The Vatican later took measures to contain the movement, especially as it moved towards what was seen as the dangerous terrain of liberation theology, particularly in Latin America.

[38] Kergoat supplied the ALN officers with banned French journals such as *Le Monde* and *Témoignages Chrétiens*, and spent many hours in conversion with senior commanders located in an HQ close by, including Si Lakhdhar Bouchema, head of Region 4 of *wilaya* 4, and Djilali Bounaama ('Si Mohamed'), who later became commander of *wilaya* 4.

material aid, such as pharmaceuticals, to ALN combatants, they did everything possible to assist the civilian peasant population, and were favourable to the independence cause as an expression of the will of an oppressed people.

In practice the Brothers faced a battle to maintain a precarious pacifist balancing act, and they came under constant harassment, threats, and acts of violence from local *colons* and some army officers, who were deeply suspicious of their location in the ALN zone and accused them of collaboration with the enemy. On 12 December 1956, for example, the Brothers farm was strafed by fighter planes and a hundred soldiers arrived by helicopter and smashed in doors during a search for '*fellaghas*'; but in general they were protected by high-level administrators, including the sub-prefect of Ténès Robert Martinod, or tolerated by Catholic commanders like Rieutord and General Allard.[39] The ability of Kergoat and Maurice to move between the ALN-controlled mountain and the French-occupied zones in the plain below, and their location in the Bissa throughout the first four years of the Revolution, meant that they were placed in an extraordinary position not as mere 'participant observers', but as embedded members of the peasant community.

The inhabitants of the fraction Bouqraba, located at over 2,000 feet in the heavily forested Djebel Bissa, only began to feel the direct impacts of the war with the first French operations into the *douar* Sinfita in late August 1956. The peasants, who simultaneously became the location of a major ALN force, were caught in the middle between the two contending sides. Brother Guy, a student visitor, wrote an entry in the collective journal on 2 September 1956 as he guarded a flock of goats in the forest: 'everything is marvellously tranquil and beautiful: one can see the distant ships on the sea', but, while Bouqraba remained peaceful, the war was closing in. 'This week the Bissa has been the object of an important "cleansing operation". The farmhouses have been raided and all the men forceably removed as far as the summit of the Djebel Bissa where they were interrogated and checked'. Most had been released, some after the intervention of Kergoat, but 'our neighbours, however, live in fear: fear of the soldiers, fear of the maquisards'.[40]

To understand how the small community of Bouqraba responded to the dramatic irruption of French forces during *Opération Pilote* we need to look first at how the inhabitants reacted to the prior arrival of the ALN and set about the organization of the OPA. Kergoat's account provides a rare insight into how the arrival of the ALN presented a challenge to the existing, pre-war power relations between the sixty-four households (*feux*). It would be a mistake to

[39] In early 1958 a dossier against the Frères even reached the attention of the General Government and Salan, and led to an investigation during which General Allard summoned Kergoat to an interview at the ZOA HQ in Orleansville.

[40] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 150, diary entry, 2 September 1956.

picture the 'normal', pre-war life of the fraction through the romantic lens of an idealized peasant communalism. Kergoat describes the peasants of Bissa as 'individualists in their way of life and work', by which he does not mean the form of autonomy of the individual that had developed historically under western European capitalism, but rather the intense solidarity of the extended, patriarchal family, each ensconced in the geographically isolated *mechta*. The consequent fierce sense of 'amoral familism' revealed itself in endless, and often violent, disputes (*nefra*) between neighbours over field boundaries, untended livestock wandering into cultivated fields, theft of cattle, and the division of winnowed grain after the harvest.[41]

In a letter of late September 1956 Kergoat remarked that the ALN had not yet penetrated into Bouqraba, unlike Beni Haoua where it had put in place new fraction *djemâas*, and everything was very quiet in the fraction, except for 'the murders and thefts between families, which is as bad as ever'.[42] In Bouqraba, as elsewhere in the Maghreb, such disputes that could, if left unchecked, threaten the very survival of the society, were mediated by the fraction *djemâa*.[43] Kergoat refers to a typical instance of such intercession by the *djemâa* when men from a neighbouring clan had stolen heavy roofing beams that had been left in the forest for later collection. The assembly was able to settle the matter, thus avoiding internecine violence and intervention by the agents of the state, the gendarmerie, forest guards, and courts.[44]

However, the arrival of the ALN in Bouqraba, and its appointment of new men to head the OPA threatened to disrupt the existing power relations in the fraction. The ALN penetrated the Dahra mountains by systematically moving from one fraction to another and, after gathering information on the existing village leaders, replaced conservative notables by more militant nationalists.

In Bouqraba the relatively well-to-do, ancient, and politically dominant Téguig family, and to a lesser extent the Derrouaz, were marginalized and replaced by Mohamed ben Yahia Boughennou, who became president of the *Assemblé du peuple*.[45] Ben Yahia, a 56-year-old, tough, ambitious man, was typical of the new political élite that emerged within the FLN during the war at village level and later consolidated their power after independence through the one-party state

[41] L. Kergoat, 'Paysannerie', 64, mentions the example of Abd-el-qader Makhlouf sentenced to seven years in prison for killing his neighbour Caibi as he began to cultivate a piece of land that was in dispute as to ownership.

[42] L. Kergoat, Frères, 153.

[43] Emile Maqueray, in his classic study of the Kabyles *djemâa*, *Formation des cités*, 50, claimed that the prime function of the assembly was to prevent or repress disorder; Mahfoud Bennoune, El *Akbia*, 52: 'It was necessary to contain such conflicts and disputes in order to avoid exposing the social cohesion and political unity of such collectivities to the threat of permanent tension and rupture.'

[44] L. Kergoat, 'Paysan au Dahra', 143.

[45] AOM 91/5Q/130, gendarmerie Francis Garnier, informer report 28 May 1957; Louis Kergoat uses a different spelling, Benrhenou or Benrena.

apparatus.[46] Ben Yahia came from an extremely poor *khammès* family but began to rise economically through off-farm employment, and at the same time gained in authority, by working for the state *Eaux et forêts*. He was the gang-master of a team of up to eighty men, among them Louis Kergoat, that were employed in road repair and logging during the 'dead' agricultural season from February to June.[47] Ben Yahia was selected by the ALN as village head because he was among the first to take a strong stand for the nationalist movement, and because of his organizational skills and ability to manage a large work force. A similar tough individual who rose into the ranks of the FLN was Ahmed Chaibi, who Kergoat describes as 'a violent man' and 'the great bandit of the region', who in 1954 had dared defy the forest guards and gendarmes by illegally clearing a part of the forest.[48]

In an initial phase there was a real danger that Ben Yahia would use his new-found authority to settle old scores. Kergoat claims that Ben Yahia, whom he knew very well, came from the lowest, poorest proletarian strata who nursed a sense of deep grievance and injustice against the better-off families for whom his family had laboured as share-croppers.[49] Even in an isolated mountain fraction like Bouqraba, where the impact of capitalist relations and a market economy were still weak, there existed significant differences in landownership and wealth that could give rise to inter-familial tensions around issues of resources, arranged marriage, and honour.[50]

Although Kergoat is reluctant to identify exactly how Ben Yahia settled scores with the old families, the implication is that violence against, and even the killing of, 'anti-ALN' elements was a thin disguise for personal vendettas. As was often the case in rural societies civil war provided the opportunity for informing and

[46] In 1962 Ben Yahia became, for a short period, mayor of the new commune of Breira. On the post-1962 dominance of the wartime ALN militants in a village of the Ouarsenis, see J. Lizot, *Metidja*, 99–100.

[47] L. Kergoat, 'Paysannerie', 150–3, Kergoat's wage was 310 francs a day in 1954. Hungry peasants constantly placed pressure on the state forests for illegal clearances, charcoal burning, and grazing, so Ben Yahia, through his position in the Forestry Commission, could exercise power through access to both employment and resources.

[48] L. Kergoat, 'Paysannerie', 89, and 'Paysan au Dahra', 265. In 1957 he became joint-head, with Mohammed Chaibi, of one of the two watchguard units, and was to die during the war. Kergoat, as a Christian pacifist, disliked violent men, but there is also a sense in which he shared Mouloud Feraoun's bourgeois disdain for the illiterate toughs that prospered in the lower cells of the FLN; see *Journal 1955–1962*, 119, 139, 'we are allowing ourselves to be led by men with neither scruples nor education. They are bandits who should go back to jail'; and the maquis administration was made up 'of former malcontents and "hard heads", and old scores are quickly settled in the name of resistance and the fight for freedom'.

[49] Author interview with Louis Kergoat, Paris 14 June 2011.

[50] L. Kergoat, in 'Paysan au Dahra', 137, divides the 25 (39 per cent) better-off households that could afford to eat wheaten bread, from the 39 (61 per cent) that eat a staple of *galette*, made from barley and acorn flour. A detailed budget for Ben Yahia (pp. 155–8) for 1967–8 shows him still relatively poor, subsisting on *galettes*, living in a *gourbis* or '*haima*' (literally a 'tent'), with his two wives, his son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren. The 18 hectare farm, held in common, much of it on a steep hillside, produced wheat, barley, and beans, had twenty goats and two cows, and the family just survived with the aid of a state pension received by the widow and children of his son who died a *chahid* in 1958, the sale of goats, honey, and whey, and some waged labour on public works.

settling old scores.[51] A few families or individuals of Bouqraba, in particular the previously dominant Teguig that had provided the fraction chief down to 1954, were accused of informing, in some instances were executed, and were forced to seek refuge in the 'French zone'.[52] However, such internal violence was not widespread enough to rupture the unity of the fraction and the ALN political commissar, who soon recognized the dangers of feuding, put a stop to it.[53]

Informers' reports dating from April and May 1957 provide a detailed picture of the structure of the new OPA of Bouqraba put in place by the political commissioner 'Si Youcef', Ben Yahia, and the *djemâa* assembly.[54] Forty-two individuals were identified by name as members of the *Comité des trois*, the five man *Assemblée du peuple*, an armed '*Moussebelines*' unit of nine, and two watch teams of twelve men each whose task was to provide a twenty-four-hour rotation in lookout posts in the hills above. The forty-two, who served as unpaid volunteers, indicate that the OPA included over half of the adult males in the fraction of five hundred inhabitants, and had members from all the main family clans.[55] Within the organization some were allocated specialized tasks, among them Boualem Boughennou (finance and supplies), Maamar Boughennou (liaison agent), and Djillali Chaibi (forest guard). But the most influential figures were Yahia Boughennou, who as head of the *djemâa* dominated collective decision-making at meetings in his house, and Mohammed ben Djilali Abid, a retired professional soldier known as the 'sergeant', who headed the nine-man '*moussebelines*' group armed with shotguns.

Mohammed Abid, with the assistance of the *moussebelines* Miloud ben Abdelkader Sayah, set up a general store with FLN funds in the adjacent fraction of Oued el Qçob. In the spring of 1957 this served as a hub and HQ for ALN operations in Region 2 (*nahia*) of the Dahra mountains, and was constantly visited by mobile armed groups of fifteen to thirty men led by 'Si Kouider', 'Boutour', and 'Si Lakhdar' (Bouchemaa).[56] 'Sergeant' Abid was also the point of

[51] S. Kalyvas, *Logic*, 78–9.

[52] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 57–8, and 'Paysan au Dahra', 137–42; Si Djilali Téguig, ex-head of the fraction, was killed by the ALN in 1957, as were two other members of the family, for what Kergoat thought to be 'ancient clan rivalries'. In the French zone Mohammed Téguig found a position as foreman during the construction of a *regroupement* camp at Sidi Amar. However, other members of the family fought on the FLN side.

[53] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 58.

[54] AOM 91/5Q/130, gendarmerie of Francis Garnier, *fiches de renseignements*, dated 29–30 April, and 28 May 1957. The gendarmerie, which was notorious as a torture centre, had the greatest success in penetrating the Bissa maquis, and its intelligence helped expand a formidable central filing system of two million files held in February 1957 by the Orleansville gendarmerie. The accuracy of the informer's reports can be verified by cross-referencing to Kergoat's book and theses.

[55] In a fraction of sixty-four households, the OPA had representatives from the leading Boughennou family (eight members), and the Derrouaz (five), Téguig (five), Abid (five), Charbi (four), El Mekki (three) and two each for the Sayah, Attafi, Achour, and Makhlouf families.

[56] AOM 91/5Q/130, report 8 May 1957 of interrogation of a captured ALN soldier, who had operated with 'Si Kouider's' unit since January 1956.

contact for two important ALN figures, the brothers Mohamed Eddaikra (Commander 'Si Abdelmadjid') and Benali Eddaikra ('Si Fodhil'), who came from an ancient *marabout* family of Vieux Ténès, and who travelled on foot or by mule from Ténès to the Sinfita HQ, to control the ALN finances.[57] The importance of the ALN headquarters in Bouqraba is detailed by Louis Kergoat, who struck up a close friendship with Lakhdar Bouchemaa, who he saw as his protector, and regularly passed the time with officers, among them Ahmed Bougara ('Si M'Hamed') and the ex-miner Djilali Bounaama ('Si Mohamed'), both future commanders of *wilaya* 4.

Until early 1957, bar a few brief incursions by the French army, the ALN maintained a virtual control of the Sinfita, such that soldiers could move around with ease, and the fraction of Bouqraba was able to run a Koranic school and undertake the beginnings of an agrarian reform. However, this was dramatically disrupted during *Pilote* 1 as a number of major 'shock' operations code-named 'Mousquetaire' (28 March–5 April) and 'OB12' (17 May), began to drive into the core of the Djebel Bissa. The next part sets out to examine how the peasant community in Bouqraba, and the OPA organization, responded to three elements of the French counterinsurgency strategy, a food blockade, mass arrests, and interrogation, and the use of divide-and-rule 'inter-tribal' war.

Starving Out the Peasants of Bissa

Many French commanders in 1956, among them General de Brebisson, had a long experience of anti-guerrilla campaigns in Morocco, Syria, Indochina, and elsewhere, and of the standard techniques of colonial warfare to 'pacify' rebellious mountain populations through economic blockade. As we have seen, the French authorities developed increasingly sophisticated mechanisms to intercept the ALN networks that transported pharmaceuticals, radio batteries, tinned food, sugar, and other supplies from the urban centres into the maquis. The tightening blockade included orders for the closure of particular markets, numerous army and police road checkpoints, and an elaborate system by which shopowners and wholesalers were required to get a certificate ('*titre de mouvement*') from the local administration or SAS, before transporting goods.[58]

[57] AOM 91/5Q/130, informer report, gendarmerie of Francis Garnier, 3 May 1957. Reports appear to show some confusion between the identity of the brothers, but Mohammed was probably killed in December 1956, while Benali continued as political commissar for Region 2. Also active in the Sinfita was the ALN doctor 'Si Hassan' (Youcef Khatib) who later became commander of *wilaya* 4, and the student nurse from Orleansville, Meriem Beidj.

[58] AOM 9140/132, on the regulation of 12 August 1957 that controlled movement of goods through certificates ('*titre de mouvement*').

One way the ALN in the Bissa attempted to get round the blockade was through the creation of its own grocery stores in the *bled*, in which the official rationing system could be falsified, or extra supplies concealed in the normal transport of goods. The gendarmes of Molière, in an analysis of an informer's report, described the system as follows: 'Those individuals who are registered on the list of traders and who live in the *douars*, under the cover of their professional activity, buy goods in bulk in the centres and transport it by mule into their *douar*.'[59] At least two rural stores in the Sinfita were opened with ALN funds, one by 'Sergeant' Mohammed Abid in the fraction of Oued el Qçob, and another by the Derrouaz brothers in Bouqraba.[60] In 1955 the young militant Abderrahmane Krimi bought a small car to set up business as a travelling trader, a front for FLN activities, and constructed a store on family land in the *douar* Taourira. He barely escaped death when seven tanks encircled and crushed his hut.[61] The ALN quickly re-established a transit route through the same location, and in March 1957 two informers' reports identified Mohammed Kraddar, a former Ténès councillor for the MTLD/PPA, as a transporter. On his regular trips to Taourira to collect building sand he carried semolina, oil, pasta, sugar, coffee, jam, and paraffin to a point in the forest close to the Krimi property, and at night local people transported the provisions by mule into the maquis.[62]

Before the Algerian war peasant neighbours of Louis Kergoat in Bouqraba going down with mules to the Sunday market at Francis Garnier would buy foodstuffs for the Brothers, but in late 1956 this situation was reversed, as the descent into what was termed the 'French zone' became dangerous. The military, that found it difficult to police a dispersed rural population, seized on the opportunity of big market gatherings to mount '*ratissages*' operations in which thousands of men were rapidly encircled and subject to triage and interrogation.[63] By late 1956 the peasants of Bouqraba were avoiding the dangerous market places that normally provided a vital function in the rural economy.[64] The Brothers, well known to the authorities, were less at risk and Kergoat would go down to the plain accompanied by an old woman whose presence made passage though checkpoints

[59] AOM 91/5Q/130, Orleansville gendarmerie, 12 April 1957.

[60] AOM 91/5Q/130, informers report, gendarmerie of Ténès, 14 April 1957. The Derrouaz were said to have received a million francs from FLN funds.

[61] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 41–5. The store, as in the Sinfita, also acted as a centre for FLN meetings, and at one stage Krimi accommodated the senior commander 'Si Mahdjoub' for a week.

[62] AOM 91/5Q/130, informers reports, gendarmerie of Francis Garnier and Ténès, 14 and 18 March 1957.

[63] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, report on *Pilote* for August 1957; five thousand men were subjected to a 'surprise' control in the market at Molière on 8 Auguest, during which three hundred were arrested. Interrogations identified men from eight *douars*, among them four FLN *douar* leaders, five fraction leaders, nineteen liaison-intelligence scouts, twelve tax collectors, ten suppliers, two terrorists, six *moussebelines*, and one recruiter.

[64] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 159, journal entry October 1956: 'Everyone is anxious: they dare not go anymore to Beni Haoua from fear of meeting up with the army carrying out an operation. The market has been deserted and they don't have much to eat.'

easier.[65] In Francis Garnier the SAS army captain was hostile to the Brothers whom he viewed as ALN collaborators and threatened to cut off all their supplies, but once he had stamped their ration lists, they could go to the local grocers, who were nearly all FLN sympathizers, and provided all the sugar, salt, coffee, and other goods they needed for themselves and their peasant neighbours.[66] The SAS *goums* and *harkis* helped to load up the mules rapidly and discreetly during the quiet siesta hours, and the Brothers would then confront the last barrier, a checkpoint at 'kilometre 3' going back into the mountains.

The problem the army faced was how to enable foodstuffs to reach hungry peasants without any 'surplus' being passed on to the guerrillas, and the difficulty of separating out or identifying pro-French populations from those that were clandestine supporters of the ALN. All too often the military found it easier to treat the entire mountain population as the enemy, and to subject it to collective reprisals, on the assumption that peasants must have acted in collusion with guerrillas that continued to find a haven in their midst. The Djebel Bissa was officially declared a *zone interdite* on 25 June 1957, which meant that the inhabitants were subjected to aerial bombardment and strafing and what Kergoat described as a virtual 'food blockade'.[67]

Added to this was the disruptive effects of troop operations. Soldiers, for example, brought in by helicopter landed, without a thought, in the middle of the Brothers' vegetable patch, which was trampled underfoot. The French army took so many mules and oxen that peasants lacked traction animals to carry out ploughing in May 1957 while seed-grain reserves held in silos (*matmores*) were seized or destroyed, as they had been a century earlier during the great anti-French revolts, as 'ALN caches'.[68] Finally young men, the particular attention of mass round-ups and violence, escaped either to join the maquis or migrated to the main urban centres and France, so that the shrinking rural economy was left in the hands of women, children, and the elderly.

[65] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 50. From his theses, we know that this was Fatma Téguig, an ALN liaison agent: 'Her white hair enables her to get past the army road-blocks near the market entrance without difficulty.' This remarkable woman scorned Islamic taboos and fed her hungry children with wild boar on the grounds that those aged under 7 were not yet subject to the Koran.

[66] The depth of commercial support networks in the towns is illustrated by the case of Orleansville where during the FLN general strike of 28 October 1956, 99 per cent of shopkeepers obeyed the strike order, although this was punished by the authorities with an enforced two-week closure. The strike was respected by twenty-three cafés (one of them European owned), sixteen grocers, fourteen butchers, and a mix of *commerçants*: hairdressers (three), vegetable stall (one), seller of baignets (two), cloth (one), and sports equipment (one); AOM 9140/60, file 'Grêves 1956'.

[67] AOM 9140/69, order of prefect of Orleansville, 25 June 1957; see also Chapter 19 below. On 'pacification' by starvation, see Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, *Le peuple algérien et la guerre. Lettres et témoignages 1954–1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, [1962] 2003 edn), 42.

[68] SHD 1H2536/1, report of Captain Deroussen, 2nd CHPT, 20 March 1957, noted of the *douar* Oued Sebt, that the ALN was using many mules, so these should be requisitioned or slaughtered. He made no mention of the impacts of such action on the peasant economy.

The economic blockade of the Bissa inevitably placed enormous pressure on peasants who, at the best of times, could barely scratch a living, and eventually began to push an increasing number to flee towards the plain. There was also a glaring contradiction between the blunt instrument of a general blockade that was experienced as a collective punishment and the stated hearts and minds objectives of the *Pilote* project.

The 'Shock Doctrine' and the Impacts of Mass Arrests and Internment

The first 'shock' phase of *Pilote* 1 in the Bissa region, code-named '*Mousquetaire*' (28 March–5 April) and 'OB12' (17 May), involved the concentration of brigades into large-scale sweep and search operations. The new strategy did not aim to track down and eliminate the regular, and better-armed units of the ALN, but rather to search out and destroy the OPA organization that was composed at the local level of *moussebilines*, peasant civilians that continued to live in their farmhouses working on the land. One reason for this was that highly mobile *katiba* units would always seek to disperse and avoid frontal battle with better equipped French forces whose prime objective was to destroy the popular support base of the guerrillas.[69] The ALN, warned by informers in the civil administration and security services, or by the system of lookout posts, moved rapidly away from those zones selected for *Pilote* operations to weather out the storm, mainly in the Ouarsenis south of the Chelif, or beyond the boundaries of the *Pilote* 1 operational area in the adjacent Oran region.[70] The mobile *katibas* were highly skilful in adapting to French deployment: thus when Rieutord moved troops from the west of Ténès to reinforce major operations in the Djebel Bissa, the ALN responded by shifting their forces to attack those zones that had been left temporarily weakened.[71]

The *Pilote* strategy in the Ténès sub-sector was to sweep up huge numbers of peasants, mainly younger male suspects, and to detain them in holding centres (*centre de tri et de transit*—CTT) while intelligence officers, through interrogation and cross-checking with index files, attempted to identify ALN militants and to build up network diagrams of the organization. The scale of the planned round-up can be gauged from Rieutord's preparation of nineteen holding centres in the

[69] Jean Servier's master plan, *Constitution d'une organisation*, 1–2, stated that 'pacification' depended on the support of the population, and only partly on military operations. Without such support, the number of weapons captured and rebels killed was of little importance.

[70] Eventually the army closed down the latter escape route by mounting an extended *Pilote* operation into the Oran region and the military *Zone nord ouest* (ZNO) of the western Dahra; see P. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, 80–92, the full text of a report by Colonel Cazelles.

[71] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, 28 May 1957. The ALN also focused attacks on a sector in which an army unit, with experience in the area, was replaced after completing its tour of duty.

Ténès sub-sector, referred to as 'cages', that would have a capacity to detain 1,250 men at any one time.[72] The interrogation process was, there can be little doubt, to include torture that was systemic in the French police and armed forces.[73]

Rieutord forwarded a report by two intelligence officers (OR) based at Montenotte, Lieutenant Domange and Sous-Lieutenant Costamagna, who in preparation for *Pilote* 1 presented the case for the systematic use of torture since liberal laws and courts were preventing prosecution of known terrorists. When prisoners were brought to triage they needed to be treated, noted the Lieutenants, 'efficiently' and intelligence was not going to be obtained, they remarked sardonically, by a suspect 'who refuses to speak, sitting on a chair before a cup of coffee, cigarette in his mouth'.[74] Rieutord, in forwarding this report to de Brebisson, along with a note on discussions he had held in Ténès on 13 February with General Allard, divisional commander of the Algerois, was seeking, although in a more guarded language, hierarchical clearance for acting 'without weakness'.[75] This correspondence, a matter of weeks before the first *Pilote* operation in the Djebel Bissa, reveals the extent to which there existed a glaring contradiction between the overt claims of the psychological action, the winning of hearts and minds, and the fact that *Pilote* began by launching a wave of unprecedented violence on the peasant community.

The regular and detailed reports on *Pilote* 1 that the prefect Chevrier was required to send to Lacoste every fortnight provide a catalogue of the huge number of peasant 'rebels' that were killed, wounded, or captured during the offensive. For example, tables for *Pilote* operations in the ZOA during the eight weeks from 3 August to 27 September 1957 indicate, 421 killed, 80 wounded, 315 prisoners, and 1,429 arrested suspects.[76] Most of these victims of repression were not regular *moujahidine* fighters of the ALN, but peasant civilians or FLN partisans, including women. The wave of repression unleashed by *Pilote* operations was, almost inevitably, unable to differentiate between active members of the OPA and the mass of ordinary peasants that were swept up in violence that

[72] SHD 1H2536/1, Rieutord to General de Brebisson, 14 February 1957. It was estimated that each incarcerated man would be held, on average, for two weeks, and that the total number of those 'processed' during *Pilote* would be about five thousand. The total Algerian population of the sector (1954 census) was 108,981, so, by my calculation, it was proposed to intern over a quarter of adult males.

[73] See Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954–1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

[74] SHD 1H2536/2*, report of 12 February 1957. The report received backing from the commander of the 2nd Batallion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, Guiges, a Vietnam veteran, who stated the situation was rapidly deteriorating in the zone, since 'we are disarmed in confronting the Muslims by our Christian and democratic principles that stops us from rendering an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth. . . . If we are going to succeed we have to employ the methods of our adversaries. Can we do this or are we to be paralysed by our civilization?'.

[75] SHD 1H2536/1, Rieutord to de Brebisson, 14 February.

[76] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, *Pilote* reports for August and September 1957.

included aerial bombing and burning of farmhouses and terrorized and decimated the very constituency that the military were seeking to win over.

The military intrusion into the Djebel Bissa was particularly intense since during the planning stage of *Pilote* 1, just three weeks before the first operation, the French army suffered what may have been the single most costly defeat of the entire war during an ambush just to the east of Beni Haoua on 28 February.[77] From its intelligence the army knew that the ALN headquarters responsible for launching the attack was located somewhere in the Bissa, and angry and humiliated officers were out for revenge.[78]

The response of the OPA in Bouqraba to the military incursion into the fraction followed the standard ALN procedure. As soon as the lookouts in the two observation posts spotted any troop movement they warned the *djemâa* head Yahia Boughennou, and while some peasants immediately returned to their farms, so as to merge into the normal activities of the community, key members of the OPA escaped to hide in the forest.[79] What was crucial in the response of the Bouqraba fraction to this moment of extreme danger, a typical reaction of the Berber people to an external threat, was the attempt to maintain unity and to negotiate as a group with the French military.[80] In Bouqraba the *djemâa*, comfortable in the assistance provided by Louis Kergoat, had taken to meeting in the Brothers' farmhouse. After a week hiding out in the forest the leaders of the fraction were so exhausted and demoralized that they decided to surrender to the French and sent an agent at five in the morning to request Kergoat to come to the group (*djemâa*) and to help act as an intermediary. Before Kergoat could act the *djemâa* surrendered to a passing French patrol and the men were dispatched to a holding centre at Hanoteau, where, noted Kergoat, 'they had to go through brutal interrogations', before being subjected to triage, and either set free or sent for trial in Orleansville.[81]

In a matter of weeks most of the Bouqraba men appear to have been released, and the French army pulled out leading to a rapid return of the ALN and a return to 'normal'. The quite brief interlude of the army incursion was however at a heavy cost, and Louis Kergoat recounts how after each operation he and his neighbours

[77] On this major defeat of the 22nd Infantry Regiment see above p. 375. The significance of Bouyamène lay not only in the heavy casualties, but also in the capture of weapons, including heavy machine-guns and radio transmitters, that equipped the ALN maquis.

[78] Louis Kergoat, *Frères*, 82, remarked on the unusual concentration of ALN officers at their HQ shortly before the ambush with whom he socialized and was treated to a rendition of the patriotic hymn, *Mine jibalina*, 'From our mountains rise the voice of free men'.

[79] AOM 91/5Q/130, gendarmerie Francis Garnier, informer's report 28 May 1957.

[80] Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence*, develops the hypothesis that those villages that best avoided a collapse into violence during civil war did so by maintaining internal cohesion, enabling headmen to negotiate with external forces.

[81] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 128–9. The fraction head Yahia Boughennou appears not to have surrendered since Kergoat took food to him in the forest and, after things had quietened, he came to eat in the Brothers' farmhouse.

spanned out into the forest to search for the bodies of those killed by the army, and to give them a proper burial. These were not the anonymous and statistical fatalities which the historian normally treats but close friends, neighbours, sons, and brothers: Ali ben Nejma, Ahmed Chaibia, Djelloul Derouaz and his wife, Ahmed Boughennou who was removed from the arms of his distressed elderly mother and buried 'at night-fall, along with the wife of Bou Guenour'.[82] It is difficult to assess the extent to which the army violence fuelled a strong hatred of the occupier, and drove the population more firmly into the arms of the ALN, but it certainly placed the message of the psychological action teams, the promise of French reforms and prosperity, in a peculiar light.

Regroupement and Divide-and-Rule Tactics

While the people of Bouqraba held on through the heavy army offensive of May 1957, some fractions were so traumatized by the global impacts of economic blockade, the destruction of houses, bombing, and killings, that they sought escape by surrendering to the French and moving en bloc into *regroupement* camps on the edge of the mountains. In the instance of the *ralliement* of the *douar* Beni Haoua at the Breira mine, under the leadership of the notable Belhai, there are indications of the French army turning towards a 'third force' strategy of manipulation of the peasantry through the capture of traditional forms of patrimonial power or 'neo-tribalism'. This trend can be seen more clearly in the case of the *regroupement* of the adjacent fraction of Souhalia, which had been previously dominated by the Zitoufi family, under the leadership of Slimane Aziz.

On 24 May, Aziz, a member of the ALN *Assemblée du peuple* of the fraction informed the gendarmes at Francis Garnier that he was prepared to provide intelligence that would enable the almost total destruction of the OPA, and that the entire fraction had agreed to join the French through a *regroupement* near the coast at Oued Goussine, 'in order to escape reprisals by the rebels'.[83] On 30 May Aziz, warned that the ALN were about to assassinate him and again urgently sought French protection, and the authorities responded by organizing the rapid *regroupement* of the entire fraction. On 2–3 June, 180 family heads, representing a population of 1,045 individuals, moved en masse from their scattered hill farms down to the SAS post at Beni Akil. Martinod noted 'their unanimous decision to resist the rebels', and appointed four leaders, one to liaise with the SAS and army and three others, soon to be rewarded with rifles, to organize an auto-defense group through a network of lookout posts.

[82] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 57.
[83] AOM 9140/78, sub-prefect Martinod to prefect of Orleansville, 13 June 1957.

The sudden *regroupement* of an entire fraction in this way, far from being exceptional, was just one in a cascade of similar mass movements during 1957. I return later to look at this phenomenon more closely in Chapter 19, but it can be seen how such mobilizations, far from being purely spontaneous 'tribal' movements as portrayed in the media, were carefully negotiated behind the scenes and co-ordinated by fraction leaders and the *djemâas*.

When a fraction like the Souhalia made the decision to join the French side, and to decamp in a single block, they were making a fateful decision, a wager that they would be better protected by an army that was there to stay, that they would be materially better off, and were backing the side that sooner or later would win the war. Once the wager had been made it was in the interest of the entire community to move as rapidly as possible to join the battle against the ALN, and it is noticeable that the inhabitants of Souhalia, within two days of the *regroupement*, had keenly identified a small ALN group, and energetically moved into action by sending a messenger to Francis Garnier, and giving signals to a spotter plane and the military that enabled capture of a rebel and location of twenty-three shotguns. Almost inevitably tensions began to develop between neighbouring fractions that were either globally in support of the French, like Souhalia, or of the ALN. An informer reported on comments that commander Lakhdar Bouchemaa had made on 3 April, after escaping the Beni Haoua and Taourira area to a new location north of Hanoteau, that he regretted having to flee from the two *douars* and that the inhabitants had 'renewed friendly relations with the French authorities. He threatened to return to the area with a big band to punish the traitors.'[84]

However, what was different about the Souhalia *regroupment* was evidence that the army in Beni Haoua was not only assisting the population to defend itself against ALN incursions but was also encouraging them to launch a series of raids against the neighbouring fraction of Larmouna al Bahari in the *douar* Sinfita. The Larmouna, assisted by the ALN, then engaged in night-time reprisals during which they burned down farmhouses in Souhalia.[85] By October the 'inter-tribal' warfare was having a devastating impact on the fraction Bouqraba. 'Among our closest neighbours', wrote Frère Hamid in the house journal, 'no flocks, almost no wheat, a few quintals of barley. In effect, a regular destructive raid (*razzia*) has been organized by the army on behalf of the neighbouring tribe. And, since then, everyone sleeps in the forest from fear of the neighbouring tribe.'[86] The SAS officer at Francis Garnier, who, although officiating with the *Petites frères* at Sunday mass, detested them as accomplices of the ALN terrorists and was appalled by their verbal attack on the army for murder, theft, and torture. The Brothers opposed the *regroupement* of the Souhalia since, they claimed, 'they had come

[84] AOM 91/5Q/130, gendarmerie report, 7 April 1957.
[85] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 192, letter from Kergoat to René Voillaume, 17 July 1957.
[86] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 198, journal entry by Frère Hamid, 21 October 1957.

over through fear; the army was dishonest since it had allowed them to be plundered by their neighbours', an accusation that the Captain denied claiming, 'it was others who had burned their houses'.[87] However, de Montalembert had recorded on 13 July, 'in the Souhalias the army has taken joint action with the population by going into the enemy territory to recover stolen cattle and the standing crops were put to the flame so that the peasants will have nothing to eat'.[88]

The small-scale 'inter-tribal' conflict, that had begun in July before de Montalembert's posting to Francis Garnier, was probably the initiative of Captain Portmann, in charge of psychological warfare in the area. As we will see in Chapter 19, such divide-and-rule methods were identical to the 'third force' tactics being deployed at this time to the south in the Ouarsenis. Such attempts to manipulate traditional forms of patrimonialism were in contradiction with a key message of Lacoste's reform programme and of *Pilote* 1, the need to address a modernizing agenda that would sweep away the remnants of the old *caidal* system.

Cutting the Urban-Rural Linkage

I close this chapter by examining the way in which Colonel Rieutord in late March 1957 launched *Pilote* 1 in the Ténès sub-sector through synchronized operations in both the rural and urban sectors. As we have noted historians of the Algerian war have tended to focus on the dramatic events of the Battle of Algiers to the neglect of what was taking place in the countryside and, in doing so, have failed to recognize the extent to which the counterinsurgency strategies tested out in the colonial capital were rapidly extended to surrounding rural areas and across Algerian space.[89] In the ZOA what might be termed the 'Massu method', to asphyxiate the ALN maquis through crushing the urban support base and supply-chain, was rapidly introduced into Orleansville with the arrival of the élite 11th *Demi-brigade des parachutistes de choc* (DBPC) under Colonel de Corse.

Specialists in colonial warfare knew, from long experience, that it was easier to track down and uproot terrorist organizations in urban centres than in hard of access mountainous or forest terrain. The strategy thus set out to asphyxiate urban

[87] E. de Montalembert, *Souvenirs d'Algérie*, 10, 14 August 1957.

[88] E. de Montalembert, *Souvenirs d'Algérie*, 9, 14 August 1957.

[89] SHD 1H2409, 5th Bureau, 17 August 1957, *La lutte contre le terrorisme à Alger et dans les grands centres urbains*, noted that despite the success of anti-terrorist operations in Algiers, attacks could only be definitively stopped by control of the maquis '*zones de base*', which is why Massu had proceeded to rapidly extend operations into the Blida Atlas and other mountain zones, a long-term process since it involved 'reconquest' of the population. The army was keen to extend the Algiers model to all major towns, but to be effective required police powers to be transferred from civil to military authorities, to which prefects were often opposed. By August 1957 the Massu technique had been applied to nineteen towns, including Orleansville, Ténès, Miliana, and Blida.

networks and to cut the flow of money, materials, and young, educated recruits into the *bled*. The methods applied in Algiers, of which Colonel Trinquier became the most well-known advocate in his classic study *Modern Warfare*, involved rounding up tens of thousands of men into stadia or holding centres where they were checked against files (*fiches*) of wanted FLN.[90] Intelligence officers, tracking upwards from low-level cadres, pieced together a picture of the total FLN pyramidal structure, enabling identification and arrest of the leaders. In conjunction with this the military carried out the enormous task of a total new census of every household and a system of close surveillance. Through the *dispositif de protection urbaine* (DPU), every house or *gourbis* was painted with the equivalent of a modern post-code, and allocated to a street-block that was placed under the surveillance of an anti-terrorist watch.

Pilote 1 was launched early on the morning of 22 March with simultaneous operations against both urban and rural targets. The parachutists of the 11th DBPC moved rapidly into Orleansville where they placed a cordon around the three hot-spots of nationalist militancy in Bocca Sahnoun, La Ferme, and the post-earthquake rehousing project of the Cité d'Urgence, and rounded up 5,400 men aged over 15 into stadia.[91] The militant suburbs, by their peripheral location and dense population of migrants from the surrounding countryside, provided a key location for the exit and entry of FLN supplies, weapons, documents, and agents.[92] By June it was reported that the parachutists had succeeded in almost totally destroying the FLN network in Orleansville, a claim that was no idle boast.[93] Having 'cleaned up' the town, the élite force, in what was aptly described as '*opérations centrifuges*' expanded their actions outwards into the surrounding *douars* of Ouled Farès, Medjadja, Sidi Laroussi, and Oum el Dra. Daring raids received much media attention, including the deployment of pursuit squads in unmarked police cars that were driven by parachutists disguised as Muslims.

However, by August 1957, when the 11th choc departed from Orleansville, while the census of urban populations in the ZOA had been completed, only fifteen *douars* had been surveyed. Only 15 per cent of the total population in the department had been identified, a sure indication that the army had been unable to track the ALN in the rural zones, especially in the Ouarsenis that was only a few

[90] Roger Trinquier, *La guerre moderne* (Paris: Éditions de la table ronde, 1961). AOM 9140/78, prefect reports on *Pilote* for October and November 1957 indicate that in the month of October 27,000 individuals and 1,700 vehicles had been stopped in the town, and in November another 24,888.

[91] AOM 9140/78, *bilan de l'Activité à Orléansville*, 11e Demi-Brigade (21 March–31 May 1957). Of the 5,400, 417 were arrested. SHD 1H2536/2* OI, Captain Stien, 11 July 1957, was highly critical of de Corse for launching into action prematurely and without due preparation, 'no doubt in order to win the benefits of an supposedly glorious and spectacular action like that of Algiers'.

[92] AOM 9140/78, *bilan*, 'Orleansville has become an important centre for the rebels, a liaison centre, a financial centre, a supply centre for the guerrilla groups in the region'.

[93] SHD 1H2536/1, Captain J. Guyomar, *bilan Opération 'Pilote'*, undated (July 1957); AOM 9140/78, *bilan*, the operation identified over 167 militants organized in twenty cells, of which 118 were imprisoned and fourteen killed.

kilometres from the outskirts of Orleansville. The OI officer Captain Stien, reporting on the failures of *Pilote* 1, remarked that on the night of 4 July an ALN band of forty men had been able to rally six hundred *moussebilines* only six kilometres from Orleansville, 'The bands move about in safety and can come to the very gates of the town'.[94] Whenever the police and army placed intense pressure on the urban FLN networks, militants escaped into the mountains, and as long as the maquis remained strong, it was able to constantly rebuild the urban terrorist organizations that the authorities claimed to have definitively destroyed.

The 'Massu' method of reconquering the countryside from the city was, during *Pilote* 1, applied not only to Orleansville, but to all the major towns of the region, Miliana, Affreville, Cherchell, and Ténès, as well as some smaller centres like the Attafs and Duperré.[95] This counter-insurgency strategy can be illustrated by turning again to the sub-sector commanded by Colonel Rieutord, and the small port of Ténès inhabited by eleven thousand Algerians and just over a thousand Europeans. Rieutord, in a detailed response to the *Pilote* plan that he sent to General Brebisson on 17 February, remarked that Servier proposed actions that targeted primarily the rural zones, 'But all the "sons" of the rebellion in the *arrondissement* are ideologically formed in Ténès, and further away in Cherchell and Algiers. Hence the necessity to act simultaneously on the Ténès milieu.'[96]

Rieutord thus acknowledged the integral FLN links between urban and rural sectors that constituted a single network. The start of operations in the ZOA on 22 March recognized the nature of this integrated organization that spanned rural and urban zones by striking simultaneously into the heart of the Dahra massif, and into the towns.[97] On 13 March Martinod co-ordinated a meeting with Rieutord, officers from the gendarmerie, and the police commissioner, to establish four mixed-service intelligence teams to carry out an in-depth study of the FLN network in Ténès in preparation for '*Opération Zephyr*' that started on 22 March.[98]

At an important meeting of the *État-major mixte*, the key co-ordinating body of the civil and military services in the department, to discuss the planning of *Pilote* 1, Martinod put forward a proposal to seal off the whole of Ténès from the surrounding countryside so that all inhabitants going in or out from the town would require a special pass.[99] General de Brebisson, a veteran of colonial warfare,

[94] SHD 1H2536/1, Captain Stien, report 'Opération "Pilote"', undated (July 1957).

[95] SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan de l'expérience 'Pilote' au 1er Juillet*, ZOA, 5th Bureau, p. 7.

[96] SHD 1H2536/1, Rieutord to de Brebisson, 17 February 1957.

[97] SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan de l'Expérience 'Pilote' au 1er Juillet 1957*, emphasized how 'the cleansing of the urban centres' was organized 'in parallel with the actions in the *bled*'.

[98] AOM 9140/78, Martinod to prefect of Orleansville, 6 May 1957.

[99] AOM 9140/175, minutes of *État-major mixte*, 23 March 1957. Among those present at this meeting, chaired by the prefect, were General de Brebisson and his staff, the sub-prefects, the commanders of the SAS, gendarmerie, and police (RG), and Jean Servier and Feaugas of the *Bureau d'action psychologique*.

replied that such a 'complete control without any weak gaps', was technically possible but would require a huge force of 1,500 soldiers that were not available. Chevrier closed the discussion by ruling that the census of the population and numbering of all the houses should be completed before looking further at the question of such a cordon. During the first fortnight of *Opération Zephyr*, which Martinod described as 'difficult and disappointing', sixty suspects were identified and arrested, of which forty were rapidly released, but through closer interrogation of the remaining twenty the officers were able to reconstruct the network leading to a further forty arrests. After forty days, Martinod claimed, the FLN organization in Ténès had been almost completely dismantled: thirteen cadres were sent for trial, while ten others had fled and twenty-five young men who had joined the maquis had been identified.

The detailed lists of those identified as FLN show that the urban network was composed predominantly of young men, with an average age of 22 years, who had been born and raised in Ténès.[100] Most of them did not have immediate peasant antecedents, and came from a range of occupations that were typical of a small port, commercial, and administrative centre, including labourers, fishermen, shop-keepers, bakers, market traders, a mason, a docker, clerks, apprentices, students and two entrepreneurs, one in transport and a restaurant-taxi owner.

As a service-centre for the surrounding agricultural region and its considerable population, the Ténès militants had multiple links to the *bled*. Intelligence officers uncovered a particularly important urban-rural underground that linked the central town and the outlying fraction of Ouled Larbi, which lay in the hills near Montenotte, about one hour's walking distance to the south-east. The police commissioner Baroin had already identified the Ouled Larbi as a key hub of the ALN network in his major investigation of December 1956.[101] '*Opération Zephyr*' confirmed this and discovered that a totally new cell, headed by Said Ould-Ahmed, had been created on 25 December 1956 during a meeting in Ouled Larbi in the home of Ahmed Robaine, who became the chief liaison agent between Ténès and the maquis.[102]

Most of the Ténès militants arrested during *Pilote* 1 were collectors, some of them minor players, like Abdelkader Guetarni who every Tuesday raised small sums of two or three hundred francs per person from those attending the market.

[100] In all we can identify eighty individuals of the Ténès network, of these AOM 9140/5, police commissar Jean Ayala to Rieutord, 30 October 1957, provides age, occupation, and background information of forty-five men, of whom thirty-six (86 per cent) were born in Ténès, three were Kabyles, and only three (7 per cent) originated in neighbouring *douars*.

[101] AOM 4i209, Baroin report, 28 December 1956, on Maamar Draini, assistant in the Muslim court (*mahakma*) of Ténès, who organized supplies to the maquis via his brothers who lived in Ouled Larbi, was a collector, and also assisted maquisards who filtered into the town. Another supply line was organized by Abdelkader Djebbour who sent goods via the grocer Maamar El Mokhtar located in the fraction Sidi Mérouane.

[102] AOM 9140/5, police officer Pierre Devouge to the *juge de paix*, Ténès, 6 May 1957.

The cash was then centralized in the hands of Tayeb Mesbahi, head of supplies to the maquis, who during interrogation admitted to the recent purchase of goods worth 230,000 francs that had been delivered by a professional transporter, Mohamed Kreddar, to Boutaleb, a grocer in Ouled Larbi. Clandestine movement of goods to the maquis passed through the various registration and checkpoints under the cover of the normal system of commercial supply to the countryside. A police report noted how, after the almost total destruction of the ALN Ténès cell in March 1957, the rebels had retreated into Ouled Larbi, where at a major gathering in May two hundred armed men had been informed by Mamer Belkacem ('Si Djillali') of ALN plans to attack Ténès, Montenotte, and the Breira army post. The Ouled Larbi base was also used to create and arm *fidayine* units to penetrate Ténès and, after each terrorist attack, to rapidly retreat back into the maquis.[103]

The single biggest military operation into the Djebel Bissa, code-named 'OB 12' was launched on 17 May, and as part of this major sweep the army decided to target the Ouled Larbi, a 'fraction in which collusion with the rebels is clear: the CCS [HQ] of the 22nd RI will make a display of force to cause the population to withdraw its support for the rebels'.[104] Clearly even the 'liberal' sub-prefect was prepared to deploy the crude instrument of collective violence against entire communities that were viewed as criminal hosts to the ALN, while clinging to the illusion that 'good' peasants could be sifted out, and rescued, from the terrorists that held them in thrall.

The civil authorities were particularly concerned by the continuous movement of young Ténès men aged 16 to 20 years, at a rate of four or five per month, into the maquis.[105] The memoirs of young, urban-based Algerian men and women testify to the way in which hundreds were motivated by a strong sense of nationalist idealism to join the ALN, often to find their romantic image of life in the maquis rapidly dashed by the harsh reality. *Opération Zephyr* identified a number of apprentices from the Ténès *Centre de formation professionnelle* who had planned to join the maquis, among them Djilali Mokretar and Mérouane ben Abdelkader Chaouch, who boasted to their comrades of having gone into the Djebel Bissa to volunteer, equipped only with a torch and dagger, but had been

[103] AOM 91/5Q/130, police commissioner Ténès, 22 June 1957. AOM 9140/78, sub-prefect to prefect of Orleansville, 6 May 1957, 'a whole sequence of shotgun murders have been carried out by the rebels coming in from the maquis'. AOM 9140/175, *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 20 April 1957, a similar urban-rural structure existed in Miliana where the *douars* Zaccar and El Hammam 'serve as lairs for the urban terrorists to the point at which the population refer to them as 'the peasant barracks' ('*la caserne des fellaghas*').

[104] AOM 9140/78, sub-prefect Martinot to prefect of Orleansville, 25 May 1957.

[105] AOM 9140/5, report of Ténès police commissioner J. Ayala, 17 December 1957. By May 1957 a recent census of Ténès, had enabled the police to identify twenty-five young men who were now in the maquis. One of them, the 19-year-old Slimane Touaibia, was later arrested and, with a speed that impressed the inhabitants, fast tracked through a tribunal and executed in under ten days, for the assassination of Ahmed Djebbour on 4 December 1956.

turned back until they had carried out an initiatory terrorist attack in Ténès. In December 1957 the police commissioner pointed to the high number of young men of Ténès who were in the maquis or had emigrated to France because of the deepening crisis of the local economy and the high level of youth unemployment. It was important to stimulate the economy, he argued, through investment in the port, roads, and industry in order to stabilize the youth, without which, 'All the effort made through the psychological plan to rally the masses to our side will be rendered vain'.[106]

Conclusion

By the autumn of 1957 the prefect of Orleansville, who had become increasingly disillusioned with the way in which the army had implemented *Pilote* 1, complained bitterly that the entire operation was being wound down before it had achieved its stated goals. The master plan for *Pilote* 1, supported by Salan and Lacoste, was that a necessary first stage of destruction of the OPA should be immediately followed by a constructive second phase of psychological action. As the prefect Chevrier noted in April, 'In order to be effective the actions must be carried out in depth. It is necessary to treat each *douar* several times over and to follow up the results before moving on to the next *douar*.'[107]

But, with the exception of the Breira post, this clearly was not happening in the interior, and when a sweep had taken place through a particular mountain zone, as in the Sinfita, the army lacked the numbers and resources to stay long enough to consolidate their position and to pass to the second phase of psychological action through propaganda teams, and the provision of health care, schools, markets, and auto-defense units. Chevrier, in the standard biological language of counter-insurgency, remarked in June that control of the *bled* could only be consolidated by 'systematic and repeated "cleansing" operations. . . . The aim of operation OB12 was the cleansing of the Bissa, but already a new infestation (*pourrissement*) is being reported.'[108]

For 'pacification' to work the army needed to be able to control a space long enough to convince the peasantry that they were there for good and not a mere temporary presence that would soon pull out to leave any inhabitants that had collaborated to the mercy of the ALN.[109] The prefect, increasingly angered by the

[106] AOM 9140/5, Commissioner J. Ayala, note 'Le chomage et ses incidences dans les milieu musulmanes', 17 December 1957.

[107] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, April 1957.

[108] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for 29 May to 13 June, and for October 1957, which noted the return of the ALN into 'newly pacified zones'.

[109] E. J. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 53–4, an army officer in El Salvador claimed the military could go anywhere it wished into a guerrilla zone, 'But to remain there is something else'. Wood

army's crude intrusion onto the legal terrain of the civil authorities, claimed that the military forces, described by him as 'unstable and precarious', were simply not the right body to be taking on board the functions of the local state. For example, the prefect objected to Lacoste that a school had been opened by the army without the sub-prefect of Cherchell or the primary school inspector being consulted, but such schools would simply disappear as soon as the army unit that had supported their opening was posted elsewhere.[110]

By November the sub-prefect Martinod was claiming that the security situation in many *douars*, including Sinfita, was worse than it had been in February, at the start of *Pilote* 1, and that the destruction of the OPA had done little to impede the ALN regulars, 'this destruction hampers the rebels much less than is generally thought'.[111] The situation in the fraction Bouqraba reported by Louis Kergoat was typical of vast tracts of the mountainous interior in which a few permanently manned army posts had been created and where little, if any, psychological action had taken place. The troops that occupied Bouqraba and the *douar* Sinfita during operation 'OB 12' had all been withdrawn after three or four weeks, and the ALN moved back to resume their 'normal' activities. The army had proved incapable of carrying out the basic task of consolidating its short- to long-term presence in newly captured *douars*, and providing the conditions that would enable stabilization of a new, pro-French *djemâa*.[112]

When a major review was carried out of the *Pilote* 1 operation in July 1957, it was deemed, at least at the higher levels of the military, to have been a success and the way was cleared for an expansion of the model to the rest of Algeria. However, a closer inspection shows that, as Servier and the 5th Bureau team in Orleansville was wound down, a number of key objectives of 'pacification' had not been realized. It is against this background that I move on in the next chapter to examine the political core of the *Pilote* experiment, which was to insert clandestine '*djemâa amie*' as the basis for communal reform.

concludes, 'So while the army could enter and secure areas at will, it could not do so widely at the same time, the classic pattern of irregular warfare'.

[110] AOM 9140/78, Chevrier to Lacoste, report on *Pilote* for 29 May to 13 June 1957.

[111] AOM 9140/78, Martinod to Chevrier, 2 November 1957.

[112] L. Kergoat, *Frères*, 129. SHD 1H2536/1, in an assessment of 9 July 1957 on *Pilote* 1 in the Ténès *secteur*, the OI Captain de la Crois-Vaubois, reported that the first phase of destruction and '*nettoyage*' had been well carried out in the Beni Haoua and Taourira, but that nothing had been achieved in phase 2 of 'construction', especially as it had received little support from Colonel Rieutort.

18

The Arzew Camp

Anthropology or 'Brainwashing'?

As we have seen in Chapter 16 the minister Lacoste backed the Servier master plan for *Pilote* 1 in January 1957 since FLN attacks on candidates to the delegations threatened the central plank in his entire reform programme, the viability of elections to newly formed municipal councils. Servier's solution to this was to destroy the FLN parallel local government, the OPA, and to replace it by a replica '*djemâa amie*'. The plan was to select promising young Algerian men from rural society, to send them under the most stringent secrecy to a special camp where they would receive intense training as potential leaders of a future pro-French commune, before being re-inserted back into a fraction or *douar* to organize resistance and form the kernel of a new peasant-based municipal government. The first cohort of forty-seven political agents was selected in the ZOA during the early stages of *Pilote* 1 and sent, under top secrecy, to a training course in the so-called 'Camp de la fraternité' in Arzew from 23 April to 3 June 1957.[1] The instruction camp was located in the perimeter of the major school of counter-insurgency instruction, the CIPCG (*Centre d'instruction pacification et contre-guérilla*) located in the port town of Arzew in Oranie, and where the apprentices could receive training from the leading specialists in COIN and the doctrine of revolutionary warfare.[2]

During the course of 1957 the 5th Bureau under Goussault consolidated its spectacular rise within the army by taking over the Arzew Centre as a lynchpin of its global strategy based on the doctrine of revolutionary warfare (DGR). In May the 5th Bureau succeeded in removing Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Fontès as director and replaced him with Lieutenant-Colonel André Bruges, a veteran of the Vietminh camps, who was one of the team of *Officiers itinerants* (OIs) operating

[1] The purpose of the agents was disguised under various labels, 'political monitor', 'political leader', '*séminariste*', and the secret camp was concealed under the acronym SIEGFM (*Séction d'instruction des élèves-gradés français-musulmans*); see SHD 1H2536/1, Captain Jacques Guyomar, commander of the *Séction*, *Rapport de fin du premier stage*, 4 June 1957.

[2] On the Arzew Centre d'Instruction see Denis Leroux, 'Promouvoir une armée révolutionnaire pendant la Guerre d'Algérie. Le Centre d'instruction pacification et contre-guérilla d'Arzew (1957-1959)', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*,120 (2013/4), 101–12; Lt-Colonel Frédéric Guelton, 'The French Army "Centre for Training and Preparation in Counter-Guerrilla Warfare" (CIPCG) at Arzew', in Martin S. Alexander and J. F. V. Keiger (eds), *France and the Algerian War 1954–62: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy*, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25.2 (2002), 35–53.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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from the *Pilote* HQ in Orleansville. Under Bruges's leadership the intention of the Arzew course was to undertake the instruction in psychological warfare of every senior and junior officer posted to Algeria, and by the summer of 1959 some 7,172 men had passed through the two- to five-week programme.[3] Arzew thus provided a key for the transmission of the doctrine of revolutionary warfare into the entire army corps, and *Pilote* 1, as well as the attached *Séction d'instruction des élèves-gradés français-musulmans* (SIEGFM) offered a terrain in which the new methods could be tested out.

The aim of the first part of this chapter is not to study in detail the main Arzew Centre, but to focus on the smaller, specialized camp, the SIEGFM, which was nested within the larger training school, and to examine how Servier and his colleagues designed a programme that was intended to transform selected peasants into political agents whose purpose was to revolutionize mountain society. The design of the training programme, intended to form a new élite at the level of local government, reveals much about attempts to deploy social science and to shape a pedagogy adapted to the distinctive psychology, culture, and language of the 'Muslim peasant'.

Section one follows through the various stages of formation, from the initial selection of candidates, their training at Arzew, and subsequent insertion back into the *douars*. Section two steps away from the Arzew agents to examine the broader canvas of how the 5th Bureau shaped the forms of psychological action and propaganda that were carried, especially by the mobile CHPT units (*Compagnie de haut-parleurs et de tracts*), directly into the mass meetings of the *bled*. From this, it can be seen how the 5th Bureau was mainly influenced by behaviourist theories of crowd psychology and manipulation, techniques that tended to marginalize Servier and a more subtle sociological or anthropological understanding of Algerian rural society.

The SIEGFM Camp and the Formation of the Political Agents

An initial problem faced by Servier and the 5th Bureau HQ in Orleansville was how to locate and select potential agents within the operational zone of the Dahra suitable for training on the first SIEGFM course that ran from 23 April to 3 June 1957. In line with the local government reform, the Bureau aimed to avoid the existing, conservative élites from the *caidat* and to recruit reasonably young, dynamic, and literate men who could displace the old guard and embrace the modern society promised under the slogan, of 'l'Algérie nouvelle' or 'l'Algérie de demain'. However, the almost total absence of state schools in the interior meant

[3] SHD 1H2523, André Bruges report, 1 September 1959, on the history of Arzew under his command, 25 July 1957 to 1 September 1959.

that such a class of recruits barely existed, or did not carry any natural authority in the fraction, and in addition potential candidates ran the risk of detection and assassination by the FLN.[4] A later overview of the first cohort concluded that the forty-seven recruits were mediocre, and only five had 'the qualities required to fulfil their mission'.[5] By June deep animosity was building up between Servier and Goussault and other 5th Bureau officers, and the ethnologist came under heavy attack for his incompetence and failure to protect the security of the operation. Among the recruits was the aged Verdun veteran and president of the *douar-djemâa* of Beni Merzoug, Si Hadj Abbas Lakhdar, precisely one of the old notables that was to be avoided. Although strongly francophile, Lakhdar appears to have got lost on the train to Arzew and was declared by an army doctor as totally unfit. Even more worrying was the fact that Servier had depended on the assistance of a local SDECE agent Clochard to recruit eight agents, but at least one of these was an FLN militant who, having completed the course, passed details of the other seven participants from Miliana to the FLN, which was actively seeking to assassinate them.[6] The FLN was from an early stage fully aware of the supposedly top-secret operation.

In a report on the completion of the first training programme its director, Captain Jacques Guyomar, detailed the problem of teaching men lacking in any kind of political culture: 'rural elements, down-to-earth and reserved, with little inclination to get turned on by ideas.'[7] Only two had a primary school certificate (CEP), ten could barely read or write French, while twenty-nine were completely illiterate in both French and Arabic. Since two-thirds of the instructors spoke no Arabic, Guyomar was forced to improvise and plan a six-week programme that depended heavily on small group discussion, role-play, sound recordings, and the visual, including film shows, and visits to naval ships, ports, and grain silos, to show 'in a tangible form the might of FRANCE'. Jean Servier, who appears to have lost interest in the project, designed an inadequate SIEGFM programme that Guyomar struggled with since it was ill adapted 'to the particularly weak level of

[4] SHD 1H2536/1, report of *Bureau psychologique*, 20 February 1957, 'Testing de français-musulmans'. Unable to evaluate illiterate recruits through conventional measures of literacy, the 5th Bureau consulted Professor Bourgey, head of the laboratory in Applied Psychology at Algiers University, that advised on various forms of *psychotechnique* that could be used to assess dexterity, mental age, memory, and honesty, through mechanical, behavioural tests, such as 'sensorial reactions to the impact of surprise with medical control of the reflexes'.

[5] SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan de l'expérience 'Pilote'*, 1 July 1957. However, a better quality of recruit was promised for the second cohort to be trained at Arzew.

[6] SHD 1H2536/1, report of Captain Stien, OI, 25 June, and report of arrest and interrogation of the FLN agent on 9 June 1957. Stien noted that Hamdane Bouradou, one of the two who had completed the Arzew course, had been taken into protective custody, but suggested that the other six who appeared 'dubious' should be left 'to their fate', i.e. to be tracked down by the FLN, who would certainly torture and kill them.

[7] SHD 1H2536/1, Guyomar report on first SIEGFM course, 4 June 1957.

the pupils'.[8] In the circumstances Guyomar did the best he could, but admitted that the instructors were ill-equipped for the task since they had no specialist training or expertise in 'Muslim pedagogy'.

The programme was divided into four themes: moral, civic, political, and military. Moral instruction involved the teaching of certain basic qualities for a future leader in the New Algeria, such as loyalty and impartiality, and the need for unity in the struggle against the FLN. Civics related to the purpose of a *commune* administration, which the participants found hard to grasp or understand, while the political element consisted of an awareness of the violence and destruction of the rebels, compared to the freedoms and material benefits of a modern French Algeria that guaranteed agricultural and industrial reform and prosperity. The military part consisted of basic instruction in the use of shotguns and grenades, and close combat. Overall, as can be seen, the Arzew programme was pitched at a very general level that could make sense, claimed Guyomar, to 'these uncouth types so little adapted to western logic', and much of the instruction related to quite practical matters, such as how to design slogans on banners or wall paintings, to make comments on the news, or how to write a signature or basic letter. While Guyomar concluded that the results of the first course were 'encouraging', at the same time he admitted that the impact was superficial and would tend to evaporate unless a way could be found to undertake the continuing formation of the agents after their return into the *douar*.

The basic mission of each agent after completion of the training programme was defined in a key Directive of General Salan on 8 September as being able to return into a *douar* or fraction to establish a 'politico-military infrastructure of an FLN type', and to recruit men that could form a clandestine micro-administration that, an exact replica of the enemy OPA, would have an executive Committee of Three, and a popular Assembly of Five.[9] The agent would need to have the authority and leadership skills to win the support of the notables, to train and command an armed, defence group, gather intelligence, liaise with the civil and military authorities, educate and train the population in the struggle against the rebels, prepare them for future elections, and inculcate new values, 'indispensable for the construction of the New Algeria'. The 5th Bureau was thus setting the bar high, and was seeking to insert agents with a level of skill and qualities that few possessed.

[8] SHD 1H2536/1, an undated fourteen-page document '*formation politique*', almost certainly a copy of Servier's course plan, confirms Guyomar's criticism. Goussault, in a note on Jean Servier, 28 June 1957, accused him of a dereliction of duty in not fulfilling the terms of his mission to design the SIEGFM programme, and refusing, despite repeated demands, to visit the camp.

[9] SHD 1H2536/1, Salan, *directive au sujet de l'emploi des français-musulmans ayant suivi le stage d'action psychologique*, 8 September 1957. The order was drawn up by Goussault, and counter-signed by Salan.

The authorities in control of the top-secret project faced a particularly difficult problem of security, 'how to carefully select, remove discretely from their *douars*, and return just as discretely, the *douar* leaders (*responsables*) that are to operate clandestinely until the moment when the arrival of the Pacification enables them to be made "official"'.[10] Salan's directive of 8 September paid close attention to the issue of clandestine reimplantation. After the Arzew training was complete the sector commanders were to receive the intelligence file on each agent, and allot them to a new type of controller, the '*Officiers manipulants*' (OM), themselves specialists in revolutionary warfare, who with the assistance of the OI, were to provide a point of contact and guidance.

During an initial phase of two weeks the OM was to have no contact at all with the agent, while he settled back 'naturally' into his community. During a second phase of two to three weeks the OM would instruct the agent to carry out certain tasks, a loyalty test to prove that he was not an FLN stooge.[11] It was only after this that, according to the assessment of each agent, they were advanced to a specific function, that could be political leader of a *douar* or fraction or, for the least able, a simple informer.

One of the striking features of this organization is the extent to which it copied in close detail the structure of the FLN *nizam*, including the Committee of Three and the Popular Assembly, and extended even to an identical system of lookout posts so that on the approach of ALN units members of the *djemâa amie* would flee into the forest or 'conceal his weapons in a hiding place and go about his usual tasks'.[12] In designing a new system of local agents Servier and the 5th Bureau did not have to invest in close sociological or anthropological investigation of the structures of indigenous society, since the vast and detailed mass of captured FLN documents and informer or interrogation reports provided an exact picture of how the ALN political organization was embedded in the traditional structures of peasant society.[13] The readiness of the psychological warfare specialists to simulate the FLN *nizam* derived in part from the doctrine of revolutionary warfare according to which survival of the West depended on copying the subversive methods of the communist 'parallel hierarchies', but was also a testament to the recognition of the enduring power of traditional peasant organization.

[10] SHD 1H2523/1, note to Salan, 7 December 1957.

[11] This was a mirror of the standard FLN procedure by which new recruits to the maquis were first required to carry out a test, usually an assassination, that would so compromise them as to make it impossible to desert to the French side. If there were any suspicions about an agent he was to be investigated by the DOP, the specialized torture units.

[12] SHD 1H2536/1, Salan, directive, 8 September 1957. The 5th Bureau here inverted the FLN slogan, 'The French arrive, so flee: we will be back'.

[13] Jean Servier, *Demain en Algérie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1959), 69, claimed solid evidence of ALN organisation, 'after spending weeks skimming through documents captured from the FLN', and in *Adieu Djebels*, 140, he recognized the skill of the FLN that had 'the intelligence to penetrate into the existing structures' of traditional society.

Although Guyomar estimated that only 20 per cent of the Arzew-trained agents, about ten of the total cohort of forty-seven, were up to the standard required, the 5th Bureau went ahead and attempted to reinsert all of them into their local community, sometimes with disastrous consequences. In the light of the closely integrated nature of isolated peasant communities, it would have been an almost impossible task to remove men for six weeks without their neighbours, and the FLN, finding out.

An overview of the *Pilote* 1 operation in early July disclosed a patchy geographical implantation of forty-seven agents in the ZOA. The commander of the sub-sector of Ténès, Colonel Rieutord, refused to cooperate with such a flawed project and, of the nine agents that were inserted by junior officers, only four were able to serve a useful function.[14] Matters soon got worse in the sector when the assassination of the intelligence officer Portmann on 5 August led to the ALN capture of documents which identified agents that had to be rapidly moved to safety. A detailed list of nineteen agents from the sub-sector of Duperré indicated that one had been kidnapped and killed by the FLN, three had been transferred to *harkis* units, while the remainder were described as mediocre, unable to do more than provide low-level intelligence, or able to make only the first tentative steps to forming a cell.[15] Guyomar reported that none of the sector commanders or senior officers in the ZOA had actively supported the placement of the agents, with the exception of the dynamic élite unit of the 2/22nd RIC based in Warnier, which was soon to be held up by the higher command as a model for the rest of Algeria.[16]

The Radical 'Re-education' Experiment at the Trois Palmiers Camp

While the SIEGFM camp at Arzew was facing numerous difficulties during 1957, and by the end of the third training course in December 1957 had produced about 185 agents, a far more radical experiment was underway in the camp of Warnier, located about seventeen miles north-west of Orleansville. Throughout the Algerian War ambitious young officers, often condemned to idle away their time in isolated posts, frequently drew up detailed proposals for innovative methods of counterinsurgency that they had tested through their operational experience in the *bled*. If they could get the backing of their immediate superiors,

[14] SHD 1H2536/1, 5th Bureau fiche, 17 July 1957; report of Captain de La Croix-Vaubois, 9 July.

[15] SHD 1H2536/1, undated '*bilan*' report, July 1957.

[16] SHD 1H2536/1, Guyomar undated '*bilan*' report, July 1957. He identified six *douars* in which an 'infrastructure of the FLN type' had been successfully inserted, three in the *quartier* Warnier (Medjadja, Beni Rached, and Tacheta), the *douar* Chemla (Duperré), the *douar* El Aneb (Miliana), and at the Breira mines.

there was a chance of gaining the attention of the higher command, and advancing their career. Some of the most original, as well as the most extreme or doctrinaire experiments, were formulated in this way, among them a sequence of reports drawn up by an intelligence officer, Captain Marescaux, who proposed and implemented a mass brainwashing 'Camp C' at Trois Palmiers during 1957.[17] Camp-C had no 'official' status within the Servier *Pilote* plan but seems to have been a quite independent initiative of the élite 2nd Colonial Infantry Regiment which, like the neighbouring parachutists of the 11e choc that were installed in Orleansville at the same moment in March 1957, enjoyed sufficient prestige and independence to simply set their own agenda.[18]

Unlike the SIEGFM camp at Arzew, which could only train about fifty to a hundred agents over a six-week period, the Marescaux experiment sought to extend a process of mass brainwashing or '*re-éducation*' first to all the men recruited into the new *djemâa* organization, and then to the entire population of each *douar*, including women and families. This Warnier camp represented a radical shift towards a 'total re-education' of a social or ethnic group of a type found historically in authoritarian regimes, as in the case of the 'counter-extremism training centres' opened by the Chinese government since 2016 to indoctrinate the Uigher Muslims in Xinjiang.[19]

The Warnier model represented a logical extension of the existing forms of psychological action, the mass rallies, like those at the Breira mine, in which hundreds of peasants were subjected to loud-speaker music, and repetitive slogans. But the gathering together of hundreds of peasants for such indoctrination proved difficult, and the Cinq Palmiers solution was to centralize the population by bringing them by lorry into a camp where they were housed in quite primitive conditions in four large army tents that were surrounded by low stone-walling. Up to two hundred individuals were subjected, over a twelve-day period, to a carefully orchestrated routine, a wake-up call at 5.30 to loudspeaker music, raising the flag, twice daily repetition of recorded messages and slogans, followed by discussion groups structured by the two-phase COIN model of 'destroy' and 'rebuild'. The first phase of the course consisted of a process of '*désintoxication*' in which the purpose was to persuade the peasants of the inhumane and damaging impacts of the FLN and its ideology, leading to starvation and slaughter by the knife.

[17] On this camp, see Denis Leroux, '"Nous devons entreprendre une guerre révolutionnaire". Un bataillon d'infanterie coloniale en Algérie, 1957–1961', in Aissa Kadri, Moula Bouaziz, and Tramor Quemeneur (eds), *La guerre d'Algérie revisitée*, 203–12. Leroux describes this project as a 'paroxysmal' instance of the doctrine of revolutionary warfare. SHD 1H2409 has a series of reports by Marescaux and sub-lieutenant Mas, 9 September 1957, on psychological warfare at Warnier, including '*Implantation politico-administrative amie*', and '*Le camp de désintoxication*'.

[18] SHD 1H2536/1, the commander of the sector of Teniet el Haad, 7 July 1957, report on *Pilote*, remarked that each army unit 'has so to speak its own way of acting', notably the élite 5th RCA, which 'very independent, carries out good intelligence work but also for the panache'.

[19] Human Rights Watch, report *Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang's Muslims*, 9 September 2018, at <http://www.hrw.org>.

The second phase of political instruction provided a potted history of the French conquest of Algeria, the emancipation of the people from Turkish feudalism, the colonial advance to prosperity and modernity, and the basic concept of electoral democracy, but with an emphasis more on duties rather than rights.[20]

The Warnier model, which was soon expanded to the rest of Algeria,[21] represented a quite different approach to psychological action from the mainstream SIEGFM programme, one that could achieve a higher level of 'productivity' than Arzew, at a lower cost, without the need for highly qualified instructors, and with the ambition of a total transformation of the mindset of peasant society.[22] The similarity of the model to the techniques of mass indoctrination developed by fascist and communist totalitarian regimes was not co-incidental, as I will show in a moment.

A typical instance of such a programme of action through mass, open-air rallies is provided by a detailed report on the *douar* Drablia, in the Dahra just to the west of the ZOA on 10 July 1957. After a 'shock' operation in which the *douar* was surrounded and twenty-two men arrested, the population of 150 men, and 170 women and children, were called to a first rally at 8.30 in the morning that lasted until 11.30. While separate medical teams for men and women set to work, 5th Bureau officers addressed the crowd with standard slogans, 'Do not let yourselves be eaten by the jackals', and 'Help us to protect your lives and property'. At 10.30 a low-flying T6 plane dropped leaflets in a surprise demonstration of military power. During a lunch break from 11.30 to 1.30 the men were screened and placed on intelligence files, after which an afternoon session was addressed by an OI speaker who closed the session at 3.30 pm with a 'psychological shock', the liberation of twelve of the twenty-two men arrested earlier, to applause and shouts of 'Vive la France'.[23]

The Warnier model sought to resolve some of the difficulties faced in the organization of such rallies. As Guyomar noted, Goussault's choice of the Dahra for the *Pilote* experiment because dispersed settlement was calculated to wrong-foot the ALN appears to have back-fired, since 'verbal propaganda faces a major difficulty because of the dispersed housing. Apart from the market, it is difficult to bring together the rural population for the political meetings'.[24] It proved difficult

[20] SHD 1H2409, *Le camp de désintoxication*.

[21] SHD 1H2536/1, report on psychological action at the Centre de Tri in Palestro during operation NK3, an extension of *Pilote*, noted how 678 suspects had been subjected to a 'brainwashing', and slogans, 'The repetition of these themes leads quite quickly to a negative reflex, the word "*fellagha*" automatically being followed by the phrase, "accursed by Allah" '. Suspects held in isolation were placed in small pits a metre deep that they had dug themselves.

[22] D. Leroux, 'Un bataillon', 208, the capacity of the Camp-C expanded to 'treat' five hundred individuals at a time, and had 're-educated' a thousand people by August 1957, and thirty-nine thousand by April 1960. Marescaux insisted that it was easy to indoctrinate even the 'simple peasants' who could, after training, become instructors in the camp.

[23] SHD 1H2536/1, report on *douar* Drablia meeting of 10 July 1957.

[24] SHD 1H3534, Guyomar *fiche*, 19 March 1957.

to centralize peasants, who had to travel in on foot from scattered locations, and in particular to carry this out in a sequence spread over several weeks in order to achieve the repetition that was seen as necessary for behavioural imprinting. Thus, in the case of the *douar* Drablia cited above, the first rally on 10 July was followed by three further sessions organized on 19 and 28 July, and 16 August. In the meantime, the FLN frequently counter-attacked by terrorizing the inhabitants through the kidnapping and assassination of perceived collaborators, before auto-defence forces could be organized and armed. The army was unable to assure protection, even when it increased night patrols, or constructed *pistes* to enable the rapid intervention of soldiers during an emergency. Nine days after the first rally in Drablia the population was refusing, after FLN threats, to provide any intelligence, while in the adjacent *douar* Mediouna the numbers attending the rally dropped from 2,000 to 1,500 between a first and second meeting because of an ALN attack, and payment of 10,000 francs to the families of kidnap victims did little to reassure the inhabitants. Under such conditions, the Camp-C system put in place at Warnier appeared to provide a logical solution, by enabling 5th Bureau officers to transport entire segments of the population by lorry into a secure camp for two weeks of uninterrupted indoctrination. The Warnier system, a half-way post to *regroupement*, was soon to be overtaken by events as the military resorted to simply uprooting and displacing tens of thousands of peasants into holding camps in the plain.

Which Social Science: Behaviourism or Anthropology?

The forms of psychological warfare implemented during *Opération Pilote* was grounded in a behaviourist science involving the repetition of key symbols or slogans. A main theme of this book relates to the way in which different actors, including the communists, the PPA/MTLD, the civil administration, and the military, sought to gain a foothold among the peasants of the interior, and the kinds of knowledge that each brought to the task. In an early stage of research I had assumed that the appointment of an academic ethnologist, Jean Servier, to both design and implement the large-scale COIN experiment in the Chelif would have resulted in a significant impact of anthropological methods on how the military set about the task of 'pacification' of Algerian rural society. However, this proved not to be the case, and Servier was not only rapidly marginalized within the 5th Bureau, but among the social sciences anthropology appeared to offer a less attractive tool to the military than theories of mass communication and behavioural psychology. The question we seek to answer is why the 5th Bureau, in its approach to the peasantry, was so attracted to Pavlovian forms of conditioned reflex.

The *Pilote* project coincided with a period from *c.*1950 to 1955 when Cold War communication theories of techniques for engineering consent and manipulating public opinion reached a peak of influence. Christopher Simpson, in his 1994 study *Science of Coercion*, has shown how in the United States military and intelligence budgets financed academic research on a vast scale and drew on a wide field of social sciences, from economics and statistics to social psychology, geography, and anthropology.[25] Centred on modern advertising, and the impact of cinema, radio, and press, much of this research looked at techniques of persuasion, the propagation of ideologies, public opinion polls, and the measurement of mass mobilization. Walter Lippman, for example, in his pioneering 1922 work *Public Opinion*, developed the idea of the 'stereotype' and the 'manufacture of consent' and during the 1930s there was a growing debate, and concern, among intellectuals faced with the danger of totalitarian states, especially during the rise of Nazi Germany, that seemed able to mould public opinion in such a way as to destroy liberal democracy.[26] Many conservative and liberal scholars in the West were convinced that techniques of persuasion, as in the case of scientifically constructed and tested advertisements that used powerful images, colours, subliminal messages, and symbols, did not depend on rational thought processes but manipulation of emotion and instincts. In western democracies, claimed many conservative experts, it was the poorly educated masses which were particularly vulnerable to manipulation by totalitarian movements, and faced with the extreme threat of an impending subversion by fascism and global communism, argued that it was legitimate for liberal states to defend themselves by suspending normal rights and adopting the same forms of scientifically proven methods of propaganda and thought control.

What is interesting in the Algerian case, is that communication theory began to embrace not only the threats of domestic subversion internal to western democracies, but extended to the illiterate, Third World masses in the colonies that were the supposed target of communist propaganda. Daniel Lerner, for example, in his influential 1958 study of the Middle East, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, argued that ignorant masses won over by glossy images of plenty and subject to a revolution in rising expectations, while entrapped in a sea of poverty, presented an explosive challenge that needed to be managed by a 'development' policy that included a countervailing manufacture of consent.[27] At the core of this élitist, Cold War discourse lay the toxic illiberal principle that the danger of the communist

[25] Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare 1945–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[26] Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922). Anxiety about mass political brainwashing lay at the centre of numerous philosophical or dystopian works, from Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949).

[27] Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: The Free Press, [1958] 1964 edn); C. Simpson, *Coercion*, 84, 100, 133.

threat to the West, especially through proxy-wars in the colonies, was so immediate that democracies were justified in suspending normal legal or constitutional rights, imposing states of exception and forms of psychological warfare that could target the ignorant masses and subject them to techniques of persuasion to achieve what was in their best interest.[28] 1957 presented, in the Algerian case, the moment when the doctrinaire exponents of psychological warfare saw themselves confronted with the immediate and ultimate crisis of communist submersion and turned, with *Opération Pilote*, to the toolkit of counterinsurgency techniques that had been developed by social science specialists.

As we have observed in the last chapter, the vanguard *Officiers itinérantes*, among them Feaugas, Stien, Guyomar, and Bruges who played key roles in Orleansville and at Arzew, had been selected, on the orders of General Salan, from among the officers who had survived the Vietminh camps. These virulently anti-communist officers had been deeply scarred by the harsh conditions they experienced between 1949 and 1954, but at the same time they were impressed by techniques of relentless indoctrination that involved psychological preparation through physical exhaustion (hunger, forced marches), stress and anxiety, followed by 're-education' that worked on conditioned reflexes (rewards and punishments), the compulsory study of Marxist texts, and self-criticism. During this period American POWs were under-going identical 'brainwashing' in China and US and French opinion was impressed by the apparent success of such techniques in changing tough professional soldiers into covert supporters of the communist cause.[29] The early 1950s, the peak of the Cold War, saw a moral panic grip the West based on the assumption that communist brainwashing techniques would enable an insidious subversion by a Fifth Column of returning heroes, secret agents of global communism. This gave rise to extensive research by the US military into techniques of mind-control, an experimentation that was grounded in behavioural science.[30]

Although mainstream psychology would later cast doubt on the underlying science of 'brainwashing' and its ability to achieve the claimed goals of indoctrination, this was not the case during the 1950s when behavioural science achieved a peak of influence in the academic world.[31] During the 1950s French psychological warfare drew on an enormous and diverse field of social science-based research

[28] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[29] See Denise Winn, *The Manipulated Mind: Brainwashing, Conditioning and Indoctrination* (London: Octagon Press, 1983); S. Thénault, 'Indochine', 237, a 1951 investigation of 450 French POWs found that 30 per cent had become 'suspect'.

[30] On the impact of the Korean scare on popular culture, see Susan L. Carruther, '"Not Just Washed, But Dry-Cleaned": Korea and the "Brainwashing" Scare of the 1950s', in Gary D. Rawnsley (ed.), *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 47–66, and Ricard Condon's 1959 novel, *The Manchurian Candidate*, later made into a film directed by John Frankenheimer (1962).

[31] On research by psychologists into thought control, see Susan L. Carruthers, ch. 5 'Prisoners of Pavlov', in *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009); Edgar H. Schein, *Coercive Persuasion: A Socio-psychological Analysis of*

that was transmitted into the top echelons of the armed forces via various military academies like the *Institut des hautes études de défense nationale* (IHEDN), and, in the case of Algeria, the CIPCG at Arzew.[32] The 5th Bureau in Algeria drew significantly on the expertise of psychologists and sociologists from the universities of Paris, Algiers, and elsewhere, a linkage that gave considerable scientific legitimacy and credibility to the experimental techniques being deployed.

The key expert in the design of the lecture series at Arzew was André Bonnemaison, a doctor in law and graduate of the *Institut d'études politiques* in Paris, director of the anti-communist *Institut de psychologie appliquée* (IPSA).[33] As a colonel in the *Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionage* (SDECE) he played a leading role in organizing trans-European psychological warfare networks.[34] In his Arzew programme 'Fondements de la guerre psychologique', Bonnemaison outlined a standard theory of mass society, with reference to the 'American school' represented by Jung, by which modern man now thought in terms of the image, and collective psychology was determined by the unconscious, and archetypes. By contrast the 'Soviet school' represented by Pavlov operated in terms of instincts and conditioned reflexes.[35]

Although the Arzew programme drew its ideas in an eclectic way from a wide range of standard texts in political propaganda, the single most influential reference was the encyclopaedic work of the Russian scientist Serge Chakhotin, *The Rape of the Masses*.[36] Chakhotin, a pupil of Pavlov, and a pioneer of ultra-violet microscope examination of cells, was a founder of the application of a theory of primary instincts and conditioned reflexes to the organization of mass demonstrations, public rallies, and the manipulation of crowd behaviour through slogans, symbols, and images.[37] Modern political propaganda, as practised by Nazi Germany did not address the reason, but rather feelings and emotions that could be manipulated by a dramatic event or 'psychic shock', and the repetition of key

'Brainwashing' of American Civilian Prisoners by the Chinese Communists (New York: Norton, 1971); D. Winn, *Manipulated Mind*, 6–35.

[32] On the role of the IHEDN, see M. Rigouste, *L'ennemi interieur*.

[33] On André Bonnemaison, see D. Leroux, 'Promouvoir', 106, who has also placed a text of one of the Arzew conferences at <http://guerrealautre.hypotheses.org>; P. and M.-C. Villetoux, *La République*, 359, 399.

[34] Giles Scott-Smith, *Western Anti-Communism and the Interdoc Network: Cold War Internationale* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); see also the online catalogue, *Fonds Antoine Bonnemaison, Archives nationales Pierrefitte* 720 AP, on the site <http://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr>.

[35] SHD 1H2409, 'Fondement de la guerre psychologique', 7 November 1957.

[36] The first French edition, Serge Tchakhotine, *Le viol des foules par la propagande* (Paris, 1939), appeared in a far more extensive edition with Gallimard in 1952, and it is this latter, which was the copy most widely available to officers in Algeria, to which I will refer.

[37] See my unpublished paper, 'Serge Chakhotin's *The Rape of the Masses* (1939): The Development of European Propaganda *c.*1914–1960 and the Algerian War of Independence' (2011), available online at <understandinginsurgencies.exeter.ac.uk>

symbols. 'The incessant and massive repetition', wrote Chakhotin, 'of the same forms, slogans, etc., and especially by accompanying this with luminous stimulation of garish colours and obsessive rhythmic tones, creates a state of mental fatigue that favours subjugation to the will of those manipulating this obtrusive publicity'.[38] The instruction manuals and course lectures of the 5th Bureau followed this behaviourist theory closely: for example, a standard circular of February 1957 on the 'Survey and analysis of propaganda aimed at the Muslims and rebels' noted that visual propaganda and the image, from cinema to wall inscriptions, graffiti, painted slogans, and banners, should be directed towards the masses in rural society, and 'trigger a calculated reflex', and 'The image and the slogan should have an obsessional power that ensures penetration into the subconscious'.[39] The behaviourist model was given official backing by what was the single most important military regulation on psychological warfare of the period, code-named the TTA 117, the work of a commission of experts that included Bonnemaison, and that was signed by General Ely on 29 July 1957.[40]

Turning back to the mass propaganda meetings organized by the 5th Bureau in the *douars*, we can see that precisely such psychological techniques, backed up by the technical officers of the CHPT with their sound-broadcasting systems, mobile cinemas, tracts, and photographic displays, were applied. The core message was always transmitted by the repetition of slogans that had, it was claimed, been carefully constructed and tested by psychological specialists, just as advertisers might study the impacts of particular designs or wording on a commercial product.

Such a reductive and mechanical form of indoctrination carried major advantages to the military in its ambition to transform Algerian rural society. The conventional forms of 'rational' propaganda faced the problem of convincing illiterate peasants, who had not received the level of education that would enable them to comprehend abstract concepts like 'democracy', 'representative government', and the 'rule of law', of the benefits of French rule. Chakhotin, through his experiments in anti-Nazi propaganda in Germany during 1932, argued that about 90 per cent of the population, the ill-educated lower classes, were most vulnerable to techniques that manipulated the basic instincts, while the well-educated 10 per cent could only be affected by rational or intellectual arguments.[41] This elitist theory suited the 5th Bureau well, since it would enable army propagandists to

[38] S. Tchakhotine, *Le viol* (1952 edn), 131, 365–7.

[39] SHD 1H2409, *note d'orientation*, *Bureau psychologique*, 23 February 1957.

[40] General Ely, *Instruction provisoire sur l'emploi de l'arme psychologique TTA117*, 29 July 1957, 54, stated, 'A slogan is short, incisive, mechanical, calculated to excite the emotions, to provoke a mass response, while recalling the idea of the theme. It is a grouping of trigger words that gives an appearance of rationality to irrational feelings of a mythical kind.' The complete text of TTA117 can be found on the Ministry of Defense site, <https://www.infoguerre.fr/fichiers/tta117.pdf>. For a close analysis of the document, see P. and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 398–406.

[41] S. Tchakhotine, *Le viol* (1952), 345–7.

work on, and transform, the opinions of the most impoverished and ignorant peasants without having to wait on educational reforms that would take decades to have an impact.

Secondly, the 5th Bureau faced an even more serious difficulty in the fact that the majority of officers, many recently arrived from France, had no Arabic or Berber, and during mass rallies were forced to address the crowds through Algerian interpreters. In this situation the leading specialists in psychological warfare, including the majority of the OI, faced insuperable problems in gaining a sociological or anthropological understanding of the 'Muslim mind', without which it seemed impossible to refine forms of propaganda that could have any meaningful impact on the target population. The director of Arzew, Bruges, and his successor Colonel de Maison Rouge, both admitted that they had no expertise in psychology and, as virtual amateurs, became self-taught 'on the job' through an eclectic reading of the classic theorists.[42]

The 5th Bureau officers were perfectly well aware of the fact that the design of propaganda, which was seen as an exact science, had to be carefully adapted to the culture, language, and beliefs of the peasants, a knowledge that they could not simply 'get up'. The Arzew programme, in its third lecture course on *La mentalité musulmane algérienne*, recognized that Algerians expressed their instincts in culture-specific ways, but despite this recognition the directors still expressed a crude catalogue of Orientalist stereotyping. The Algerian was viewed as highly impulsive, improvident, and inconsistent and, despite extraordinary powers of factual recall, lacked imagination and a critical spirit: 'his intelligence is immobile. . . . He has, unlike us, no understanding of cause and effect.'[43] When André Bruges departed from Arzew in 1959 he admitted that the entire psychological offensive had been flawed by a failure to understand the historic impact of Islam on 'the collective subconscious of the Muslim. . . . we still lack an in-depth analysis of the conscious and subconscious psychology of this particular universe.'[44] Despite this, there is very little evidence of the 5th Bureau officers in the field utilizing an ethnographic or sociological approach to the task in hand, in part because such a political science involved a level of academic expertise that they simply did not, or could not, possess. As Servier found to his cost, despite his claim that anthropology held the key to unlocking the hidden secrets of FLN organization,[45] this was simply

[42] SHD 1H2523, Bruges report, 1 September 1959, 'before instructing others, we had to teach ourselves'.

[43] SHD 1H2409/2, Arzew 3rd Conférence. On colonial psychiatry and its links to psychological warfare, see, in addition to the major field of Fanon studies, Richard C. Keller, *Colonial Madness: Psychiatry in French North Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 150–60.

[44] SHD 1H2523, Bruges report, 1 September 1959. Bruges praised the work of a young sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (1958) that was helping to fill this gap. Bruges may have known about Bourdieu through his work with the 5th Bureau, and his presence alongside Goussault in the top echelon *Comité restreinte d'action psychologique*; see minutes of 13 March 1957 in AOM 12CAB107.

[45] I have examined Servier's application of ethnology to counterinsurgency more closely in a 2017 paper (unpublished), 'From Ethnology to Counter-insurgency'.

not a 'transferable skill', and officers attending the two-week programme at Arzew could only pick up a smattering of knowledge about Algerian society.[46] In practice the behavioural science that was deployed by the 5th Bureau paid little heed to the cultural specificity of rural society since it was grounded in a theory of universal human instincts so that Algerian populations could be manipulated by conditioned reflexes that were almost identical to those of 'western man'.[47] The fatal attraction of a Pavlovian science of conditioned reflexes to the 5th Bureau was that it enabled propaganda teams of junior officers, without any meaningful knowledge of rural society, to carry out a mechanical indoctrination in the knowledge that such forms of psychological warfare had been tried and tested by specialists. Goussault and Feaugas insisted that such techniques were reliable since symbols and slogans were designed and tested centrally by experts before transmission to propaganda teams at the local level, but there is little evidence of the 'specialists' moving much beyond the level of mechanical formulae.

Measuring the Impacts of Psychological Action

The champions of psychological action did not, however, have it all their own way, as can be seen from various forms of opposition that began to appear from the very beginning of the *Pilote* 1 project. This developed in part because senior officers were deeply hostile to 5th Bureau attempts to impose a strata of doctrinaire *Officiers itinérantes* that, acting like revolutionary or Soviet political commissars, created a 'parallel hierarchy' that laid claim to instruct even senior commanders in the field in the doctrine of revolutionary warfare.[48] The burning zeal and conviction of the OI that they held the key to victory over communist subversion, grated with experienced, professional officers like Lieutenant-Colonel Bruch, commander of the Orleansville *secteur*, who wrote an angry letter to Feaugas to say that he had fully supported psychological action in the town during the opening phase of *Pilote* 1, and did not need instructions telling him how to calculate the quantity of glue and brushes necessary for a poster campaign.[49] But more damaging to the 5th Bureau was a widespread, and growing, opinion that the 'scientific' propaganda was poorly designed, had little deeper or enduring

[46] SHD 1H2525, *Bulletins de sondage*, 21 October to 2 November 1957, questionnaires completed at the end of the Arzew course, show a high level of dissatisfaction with a programme that was 'too abstract' and lacking in practical application.

[47] This was in general the case, even when the 5th Bureau experimented with colour codes that were regarded as carrying symbolic or deep subconscious meanings in Islamic culture. During the important referendum of 28 September 1958 the anti-Gaullist 'No' ballot papers were printed on purple paper because of the supposed negative reflexes this produced in Muslim society.

[48] SHD 1H2533, a letter from Goussault to OIs, 20 September 1957, warned against the dangers of acting in an arrogant way.

[49] SHD 1H2536/1, note from Bruche to Feaugas, undated.

impact on the population, or was simply ridiculous. The sector commander of Teniet el Haad, in a report on *Pilote* operations, remarked that the centrally produced tracts and posters were poorly adapted to the specific conditions of his area.[50]

But the most mordant, ironic attack on the methods of psychological warfare came from Jean Servier in *Adieu Djebels*, in which the ethnologist, who had an exaggerated sense of his own brilliance, sought to settle scores with incompetent generals who had rejected his advice. In one amusing sketch Servier and two veterans of the special forces could barely contain their mirth when an earnest officer from a CHPT team came to seek their advice on the suitability of showing a Donald Duck cartoon that was in English.[51] Servier was later called to a meeting of 5th Bureau officers in the General Government, and presented with a folder of fatuous slogans that he learned with stupor were to be used by them during operations, although they had no knowledge of 'the language, customs, and social ethic', of the target population. Servier felt sorry for well-meaning junior officers in the field who 'go out into a unknown country', with directives signed in Paris and Algiers by those claiming to be 'psychologists'.[52] It is hardly surprising that by June 1957 relations between Servier and Goussault and the 5th Bureau team in Orleansville had reached breaking point.

This leads into the question of why ethnology, which Servier claimed held the key to counterinsurgency, was to play such a minor part in *Opération Pilote*. A number of factors came into play. Servier showed deep disdain for hide-bound generals like Olié who, while inhabiting air-conditioned offices and out of touch with the reality of peasant society, dismissed his superior knowledge as an anthropologist.[53] General Olié, an intellectual who had a long experience of colonial warfare, was not overly impressed by Servier's support for a segmentary theory of *çofs* politics, perhaps with good reason, since the ethnologist's use of this mechanical model of tribal group conflict was seriously flawed.[54]

Secondly, where Servier demonstrated how his specialist skills had enabled a deeper comprehension of peasant radicalism, it was invariably through the

[50] SHD 1H2536/1, report of the commander Teniet el Haad, 7 July 1957.

[51] J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 49–51; D. Galula, *Pacification*, 65, also remarks that psychological actions were regarded in much of the army as 'ridiculous' and a 'standard joke'.

[52] D. Galula, *Pacification*, 95–100. In these two incidents Servier is referring to the period of the *Oiseau bleu* operation in Kabylie in late 1956.

[53] J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 40–2, 158–9. Servier always felt that in informing a general that he was an ethnologist was to reveal, 'a social skill that was barely mentionable'. Yet, far from being a minor issue, such obtuseness, 'the criminal naivety of the *États-majors*', carried horrendous implications for the prosecution of a bloody war.

[54] In *Dans l'Aurès* Servier claimed to have heroically defended the town of Arris from an FLN attack on 1 November 1954 through his skill as an ethnologist in decoding the traditional inter-tribal rivalries (*çofs*) of two competing clans. However, Nordine Boulhais, *Des Harkis Berbères de l'Aurès au nord de la France* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), 23–82, and Michel Roux, *Les harkis, les oubliés de l'histoire 1954–1991* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 29–35, have exposed the flaws in this tale of derring-do.

deployment of ethnology as a key for unlocking the 'secrets', and outwitting the defensive ploys, of tribal elders or FLN agents. Servier was influenced here by his mentor Marcel Griaule who deployed interrogative oral fieldwork as an instrument to crack the *omerta* of African tribal elders, described by James Clifford as a method to 'smoke out the truth' and that used investigative methods not unlike those of the police or *juge d'instruction*.[55] In his narrative Servier frequently refers to his ability to wrong-foot or surprise peasants by his forensic skill in picking up the signifiers of dialect, local customs, tattoos, style of clothing, and horse harness, that identified their clan and place of origin. But such performative tricks did not carry much weight with the 5th Bureau, since such intelligence made little practical difference to the war on the FLN, and it represented a type of arcane knowledge that the 'Professor' could deploy, but which could not be mastered by COIN specialists, let alone the officer corps.[56] It can also be noted that Salan and Lacoste were not drawn to Servier's master plan because of its subtle ethnographic insights, but because it provided a clever synthesis of current, pragmatic COIN thinking.

At the beginning of *Pilote* 1 in February 1957 the Algiers government failed to provide any clear indication as to how long the operation would last, but by early July a consensus emerged that it was time to carry out a full assessment of the operation, in particular because the authorities needed to have a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of an experiment that was being rapidly extended to other parts of Algeria.[57] Following this assessment Lacoste decided to wind down the 5th Bureau outpost in Orleansville and to transfer Servier to Algiers where future *Pilote*-type operations, that were now spreading into the areas of the Mitidja, Medea, Mostaganem, and elsewhere, were to be centrally controlled by a new planning body, the *Organisation d'étude et de direction des Opérations pilotes*.[58] Lacoste's objective in this was to restore a unity of direction after a complex battle that had broken out between numerous civil and military authorities on the ground, including prefects and Zone commanders, as to who was in

[55] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 69–78; Eric Jolly, 'Marcel Griaule: La construction d'une discipline (1925–1956)', *Journal des africanistes* 71.1 (2001), 167–9.

[56] SHD 1H2409, a report of 9 September 1957 by sub-lieutenant Mas at Warnier, provides the rare exception of an officer promoting sociology as a key tool for COIN operatives who needed to understand their *douar* in depth, 'its customs, the rivalries of families or *boccas*, its beliefs, and opinions'. In his ethnography Servier had shown how the opening of the agricultural cycle was symbolically in the hands of the most prestigious (often *marabout*) family. Mas picks up on this as a means for intelligence officers to identify where power lay concealed within the fraction, 'Which family starts the harvest? This family is in effect the most influential and explains why in general it provides the president of the rebel *djemâa*.'

[57] SHD 1H2536/1, General Allard, Commander of the Algiers division to Salan, 5 July 1957, called for such an assessment and proposed a top-level meeting chaired by Lacoste in Orleansville on 17–20 July.

[58] AOM 9140/78, Lacoste order, 6 August 1957, for the creation of the '*Organisme d'Étude*'; Lacoste to Servier, 6 August, on his transfer to the General Government as *Inspecteur des Opérations pilotes*.

charge, and who should benefit from any additional resources of personnel, materials, and cash. Although officially *Pilote* 1 was to continue until about October of 1957, in practice the Orleansville project was being wound down and the mass of reports and assessments produced during the global review (*bilan*) of July provides the best point at which to explore the question of the impacts of the intense phase of intervention in peasant society that had lasted for just over three months, from late March to June 1957.[59]

The outstanding feature of the archival record is the systemic gap between the optimistic reports produced by the senior commanders, most notably Goussault, and the highly negative, and often disillusioned, assessment of lower-level officers, the OI, Servier, and the prefect.

Pilote 1: Success or Failure?

As part of the review process Colonel Goussault carried out an inspection tour of the *Pilote* zone on 15–17 July and reported to Salan that pacification in the Cherchell *secteur* 'is taking place smoothly under extremely satisfactory conditions', in the Orleansville sector three out of five *douars* were 'almost entirely pacified', the Arzew-trained agents were well-inserted and 'are doing an excellent job', while his overall impression was 'very favourable'.[60] This could not have been further from the truth. Goussault, felt that his personal reputation was at stake in the huge experiment for which he claimed paternity, and was keen to provide a positive gloss on a system that was then being rapidly expanded throughout Algeria as a model of COIN operations.[61]

A lot hung on the *Pilote* project which, from the very beginning, had been held up by Lacoste and the top generals as crucial to the process of turning the tide against the inexorable FLN advance and saving Algeria. By August 1957 the ZOA had become a showcase for French counterinsurgency, visited frequently by Lacoste, the Algiers top-brass and journalists, as well as military attachés from around the world.[62] On 2 August Feaugas led a delegation of military attachés from West Germany, Belgium, Chili, Spain, Iran, and Argentina to the Orleansville region, who were shown a CHPT and medical team at work, while

[59] SHD 1H2536/1, contains numerous reports on the *Pilote* experience from OIs, local commanders, and others, but the key document is General Renaud, Commander of ZOA, *bilan de l'experience 'Pilote' au 1er Juillet 1957*, 18 pp. typed, with twelve appendix tables, graphs.

[60] SHD 1H2536/1, Goussault to Salan, 17 July 1957.

[61] D. Galula, *Pacification in Algeria*, 66–7, reports a long conversation with his patron Goussault in January 1957 when Galula poured scorn on the ability of the Arzew project to indoctrinate agents. In under six months Goussault had acknowledged failure of the plan.

[62] D. Leroux, 'Nous devons', 207, on a visit of seventeen attachés to Warnier on 4 October 1957. Important visitors to the *Pilote* zone were transported by helicopter to witness carefully prepared mise en scène. Favourite stops were the Douar Bou Maad, Medjadja, and the *harkis* of *bachaga* Boualam that often paraded below the impressive dam at Oued Fodda, a symbol of French colonial modernity.

on 26 August Generals Salan and Colonel Goussault and their respective wives, General Allard, and other dignitaries, arrived by helicopter in the pacified *douar* of Medjadja where they visited the family and admired the children of the newly installed Arzew agent, the Political Commissar Ben Adji.[63]

Such parading, the Algerian equivalent of Potemkin villages, would seem to have been par for the course, but in addition, what Denis Leroux has termed 'the illusion of pacification' was sustained by the metrics or statistical data used by the 5th Bureau to map the success of *Pilote* 1.[64] The French army deployed a system of 'psychological mapping' to gauge the extent to which a target population was favourable or not to the FLN, and in the case of *Pilote* 1 this exercise was carried out on 1 March, just before the first operations, and just four months later on 1 July, to measure the impact of the exercise (see Table 6).

Serge Chakhotin claims to have first developed such a system in 1917 when he was director of OSVAG, a vast propaganda organization in Denikin's Volunteer Army in Russia, that provided daily 'political weather maps' based on mass data

Table 6 Psychological mapping of population and *douars* in the *Pilote* zone.[65]
A system of four colour-codes was used to map fifty-one *douars* within the operational zone and claimed a remarkable elimination of the FLN so that, for example, thirty-eight 'contaminated' *douars* with a total population of 136,000 on 1 March 1957 had by 1 July been reduced to eight *douars* with a population of 32,000.

	1 March Inhabitants	**%**	**1 July Inhabitants**	**%**	**1 March Number of *douars***	**1 July Number of *douars***
'cleaned' *douars* (pink)	15,000	7.5	100,000	50	2	21
In process of rallying (orange)	17,000	8.5	18,000	9	3	4
Partly 'contaminated' (brown)	32,000	16	50,000	25	8	18
'contaminated' (green)	136,000	68	32,000	16	38	8

[63] The *Etablissement de communication et de production audiovisuelle de la défense* (ECPAD), Ivry-sur-Seine, is the repository of a huge volume of photographs, mainly by army journalists, of the Algerian War: see ALG/57/381 (thirty-eight photos of the military attachés visit), ALG/57/391 and ALG/57/401 (103 photos of the Salan visit). The presence of Mesdames Salan and Goussault, along with female nursing teams and Algerian infants, provided an image of domesticity and tranquillity, a sign of total eradication of ALN terrorism. The visit by Colonel Garcia-Mira, military attaché of the Argentinian air-force on 2 August, carried sinister implications since he later appeared among the officers in Buenos Aires that applied the lessons of the '*école française*' in the mass repression, torture, and 'disappearances' following the military coup of 24 March 1976; see M.-M. Robin, *Escadrons*, 169.

[64] D. Leroux, 'Opération Pilote', 157–9.

[65] SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan de l'experience*, app. 3, *Situation comparative de l'État d'Esprit des douars et habitants de la zone Pilote*.

that charted changing political moods, and in particular the 'psychological condition of the peasant masses'.[66] After 1914, what Peter Holquist has called the European 'national security state', ushered in a new kind of political order in which vast bureaucracies engaged in the surveillance and quantification of public mood and attitudes so as to better measure, assess, and transform opinion, techniques that spread into the colonial intelligence services.[67] On 10 February the OIs in Orleansville were ordered to draw up a 'psychological map' of each sub-sector, while Captain Deroussen, head of the 2nd CHPT unit, did likewise for all the townships and *douars* in the *Pilote* zone. While the documents provide no information as to the database and Deroussen only refers to 'the synthesis of a great number of sources', it is clear from other reports that officers used an eclectic range of indicators, applied quite subjective or inconsistent evaluations, and for most *douars* arrived at vague generalities. Deroussen reported on *douars* that were, for example, described as '*milieu douteux*', '*bonne ambiance*', '*hésitant*', '*repaire rebelle—mauvais*', '*signes de détente*', '*bon*', '*assez bonne*', '*population fermée sur elle même*', '*pourris*'. Captain Nomura explained how, in a *Pilote* 2 extension in the Palestro region, he had found it difficult to arrive at a 'psychological map', but finally, 'I judged that it was more normal to colour these *douars* in pink shading, some of them having changed from red to pink, the others being more or less rotten (*pourris*) with various trends'.[68]

The archives are packed with statistical data and graphs that were kept by the French army, of which typical indicators of the state of mind of a local population consisted of the number of terrorist attacks, the quantity of arms seized, attendance at mobile medical centres, numbers obeying an FLN strike call, percentage of taxes paid, and other quantifiable data. The statistics of tax returns, that had long been used by administrators as an index of peasant resistance, as well as the efficiency of individual *caids*, provided the SAS and army with the best data that could be mapped at the level of the *douar* and fraction. The percentage of taxes collected in the sub-prefecture of Miliana, for example, fell from 72 per cent in 1955 to 66 per cent in 1956, while the Ténès tax office went from 88.78 per cent to 54.21 per cent.[69] The SAS for El Aneb, a *douar* strongly invested by the PCA-FLN, reported a low return of 53 per cent in November 1957, but added that three fractions, Bougmil, Terghouat, and Taghment, had resisted all collection.[70]

[66] S. Tchakhotine, *Le viol* (1952 edition), 329–31; Peter Holquist, '"Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work": Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context', *Journal of Modern History* 69.3 (1997), 415–50.

[67] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*; S. Kalyvas, *Logic*, 210–11, notes how colour-coded mapping was used by the British army in Malaya and, in its most sophisticated, computerized form, by the Americans in Vietnam, as well as in Guatemala, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, and Colombia.

[68] SHD 1H2536/1, Captain Nomura, Operation NK3, 31 May 1957.

[69] AOM 12CAB54, prefect of Orleansville, monthly report for January 1958.

[70] AOM 4SAS54, SAS El Aneb, 10 November 1957. 'These fractions', the officer noted, 'remain absolutely resistant to our penetration'.

Alongside such statistical data, which leant itself to a degree of mapping through space and time, reports referred to a vast range of 'signs' that simply could not be quantified: peasants no longer tore up tracts, became blood donors, spoke more openly against the FLN, smoked, did not flee on sight of the army, acted in a friendly way, and so on. But the kind of statistical data given in Table 6 above, while giving the comforting illusion of mathematical precision, was illusory, and the claim that the population in the *Pilote* zone had shifted in under four months from 136,000 'contaminated' by the FLN to 32,000 was meaningless.[71]

In the French army, as in so many hierarchical organizations, officers simply fed up the chain of command the positive reports that they believed their superiors wished to hear. This is why a micro-history of the Algerian war is so important: the historian exploring the field top-down from the position of the central decision-makers might come to the erroneous conclusion that counter-insurgency was successful in its indoctrination and control of rural society, whereas the reality was quite different. I have already shown how this was the case for many peasants in the Dahra, like those at Bouqraba, but I will close this chapter by looking at some of the internal problems of *Pilote* 1 at the local level as recorded in a series of detailed prefectoral reports between April and November 1957 that provide a remarkable narrative and overview of the counterinsurgency operation as it unfolded.[72]

One of the most significant factors that undermined the *Pilote* 1 project from start to finish was a bitter, running conflict between the military and civilian authorities. Despite the existence of the *État-major mixte*, the joint decision-making committee that met in Orleansville, tensions over respective powers festered. The reports of OI officers like Stien and Feaugas lambasted the prefect for his inactivity or brake on psychological action in policing Orleansville. A 5th Bureau note, probably by Goussault, remarked that the armed forces were engaged in a 'total war' that demanded the coordination of military, police, political, psychological, administrative, financial, cultural, medical, and social elements. This was why it was necessary that during the first stage of operations the army should receive, 'without restriction all civil and military powers', although once

[71] Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, 'The Dynamics of Violence: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES)', *Journal of Peace Research* 46.3 (2009), 335–55, argue that the American HES in Vietnam was able to chart on a monthly basis, finely grained data from thousands of villages, and controlled by questionnaires, and this is of sufficient quality to enable accurate statistical analysis. But they note the exceptional, and perhaps unique, nature of HES data-collection, and that historically military data collection has been subjective or erratic, as I am arguing for Algeria. The HES data also showed an 'optimistic bias' since there were incentives to record progress in pacification.

[72] On 26 April Lacoste in a telex to the prefect, AOM 9140/78, ordered Chevrier to make weekly reports to him on *Pilote* 1. Chevrier complied by sending fortnightly, and later monthly reports, that synthesized intelligence received from sector commanders and sub-prefects, while also offering the prefect's own assessment.

the FLN had been entirely destroyed the civil authorities could resume their normal function.[73]

Although Chevrier obeyed an order from Lacoste on 27 July to surrender police powers in Orleansville to the army under the special powers act, as had happened with Massu in Algiers in January, the prefect stood firmly against the growing military encroachment on his legal authority. He was quite forthright in his reports to the Minister when expressing his hostility towards the 5th Bureau and Servier that were operating outside the normal military and civilian structures. Psychological action 'has a strong tendency to escape all hierarchical control and to constitute in my department a third force on the margins of the civil and military authorities'.[74] He depicted Servier and the OI officers as a politically driven, almost fanatical, group with totalitarian tendencies, fervent disciples of Mao Tse Tung and theories of revolutionary warfare that had been developed by the 'extreme left'.

The prefect was strongly opposed to the core of the Servier project to secretly train agents in Arzew who would be inserted into the *douars* to head assemblies that copied the ALN *nizam*. First of all, he claimed, he was kept in the dark about this plan, but what he did know pointed to the construction of a new tier of local government that was threatening to cause major confusion by taking on the same duties, or doubling up, on the *commune* reform that was currently being introduced. Servier's new *djemâa* assemblies covered the same territory, and had the same administrative functions, as the *commune* bodies, and 'it's a strange way to proceed to make the same individuals subject to two hierarchies'.[75] In addition the Arzew-trained 'political commissars' were threatening to displace the SAS, that Servier wished to abolish, that fell under the civil authority.

In addition Chevrier went on to cast doubt on the enduring impact of the propaganda teams. He was willing to accept that the slogans pumped out from loud-speakers at rallies had an effect on peasants, 'these simple souls, if not primitives', and some mountain people could repeat word for word the phrases they had heard a fortnight earlier, but such slogans would not last unless backed up by repeated actions over some time.[76] What Chevrier called the '*politique du sourire*', the occasional spectacular political rallies, was not enough on its own since such imprinting was 'superficial', and the failure to eradicate the ALN meant that the inhabitants reverted to their previous attitudes as soon as the army departed. Populations rallied to the French side for pragmatic reasons, such as the seeking of protection from the rebels during the harvest, and was 'more an indication of the mindset of poor peasants than proof of support for France'.[77]

[73] SHD 1H2409, 5th Bureau, Algiers, 22 July 1957, *fiche au sujet des opérations combinés*.
[74] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for period 29 May to 13 June 1957.
[75] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for September 1957.
[76] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for 22 March to 30 April, 1957.
[77] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for August 1957.

Finally, Chevrier insisted that the military impingement on the civil authorities was counter-productive, since the army could not provide the stability and continuity necessary to carry out economic and social development, from running schools to building houses, that should be in the hands of the civil authority. He even suggested, a red rag to Goussault, that the 5th Bureau outpost in Orleansville be transferred to the prefecture where the prefect could control its operations and budget, and assure a unified political direction to local government.

Lacoste was not totally deaf to such pressure from the prefectoral authorities, and attempted, by two orders of 6 August and 7 December, to settle the interminable wrangles between different civil and military authorities over the extension of various *Pilote* initiatives throughout the Tell, and the question of who controlled which areas, and the additional materials, personnel, and finance that they attracted. In his directive of 7 December Lacoste sought to reaffirm the classic division between the political and administrative authority of the civil authorities, and the operational and public order responsibilities of the military. During *Pilote* operations, that were now proliferating throughout northern Algeria, it would not be accepted that 'a parallel or competing organization be allowed alongside the politico-administrative infrastructure created by the Civil Authorities'. In particular any existing Committee of Five would have no status or role until the official communes (*Délégations spéciales*) had been installed, and after that could not be set up at all, or if the military attempted to do this, they required the prior agreement of the prefect, sub-prefects, and SAS leaders.[78] However, the writing was already on the wall for Lacoste, and one can discern within the army the growing discontent among senior officers with the attempt to contain and restrict their power when 'total war' demanded a single and undivided authority. Five months later the army coup d'état of 13 May 1958 led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic.[79]

December 1957 seems to mark the moment at which the Algiers government came to recognize that the original Servier plan to create a clandestine political organization, the *djemâa amie*, was unworkable, in part because its existence was perfectly well known to the FLN. The propaganda functions of psychological warfare, the claimed battle for hearts and minds, would continue, as it did until the end of the war. However, during the course of *Pilote* 1 in the Chelif region, there were signs of the gathering strength of conventional 'big army' tactics that radically undermined the logic of psychological warfare. On 2 July the prefect of Orleansville remarked on a new 'orientation' by the army during *Opération Pilote*, that consisted of a 'merciless fight against the adverse bands'.[80] It would appear

[78] SHD 1H2536/1, Lacoste order to IGAME and prefects, 7 December 1957.

[79] On the complex forces that conspired to take power in Algiers, see Christophe Nick, *Résurrection: naissance de la Ve République, un coup d'état démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1998).

[80] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report, 13 to 29 June 1957.

that commanders, often agnostic towards psychological action, lacked the patience to engage in the slow work of making contact with the peasantry and introducing welfare projects, and were determined to use big unit operations to attack the ALN *katibas*, a strategy that was not the claimed purpose of the *Pilote* experiment. In September Chevrier remarked on numerous operations in the Ténès sector that had contributed 'to a deterioration of the political situation due to the brutality and frequent lack of judgement by the army', and that had ignored the advice of SAS officers and others who were working in close contact with the population.[81] A widespread complaint of SAS officers throughout Algeria was that brutal military operations could, in a matter of hours, destroy many months of careful work to build positive relations with rural populations.[82] The region did not have to wait for the huge, 'steamroller' operations for which General Challe became notorious after 1958, since such methods were already being deployed by Colonel Bigeard's Parachute Regiment near Miliana in October 1957, and were accompanied by a surge in the scale of internment and killings.[83]

To conclude, the *Pilote* 1 project, which was being wound down in the Chelif by August 1957, was a relatively fragile and short-lived experiment that, contradictory as it may seem, was being widely proclaimed by the Algiers government as a success and extended throughout the colony. However, the essential thinking and purposes of psychological action, that revolutionary warfare consisted of a battle for the hearts and minds of the peasantry, had been stripped out by a surge in classic 'big unit' army operations that showed little concern for the populations that suffered from 'collateral damage'. Psychological action continued—Challe was one of its main proponents—but mainly as a carefully orchestrated propaganda to show, through the media, how tough soldiers personally cared for small children and women. In the Dahra and Ouarsenis, the failure of the 5th Bureau to eradicate the ALN and establish fully secure and stable 'pacified' zones in the mountains, led commanders increasingly to engage in the most violent agenda of all, the systematic destruction of settlements and the forced evacuation of hundreds of thousands of peasants into refugee camps (see Chapter 20).

[81] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report, September 1957.

[82] Grégor Mathias, *Les sections administratives spécialisées en Algérie: entre idéal et réalité (1955–62)* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1998), 148–50.

[83] AOM 9140/78, prefect to Lacoste, *Pilote* report for October 1957. Chevrier reported that in the ZOA during October, 213 'rebels' had been killed, 42 wounded, 1,822 arrested, and 295 interned as prisoners.

19

Modernity or Neo-tribalism?

'Third Force' Strategies in the Ouarsenis

A key element in the ideological position of Servier and the 5th Bureau was that Algeria could only be saved as a French colony through a programme of political and economic modernization that could break the hold of the old Algerian and European élites, in particular the big landowners that exploited the rural masses. This vision of a future 'Algerie nouvelle', which was shown in newsreels and propaganda films to peasants by mobile cinema lorries, contrasted a past of feudal poverty and disease to a dynamic colony integrated into a French motherland and 'Eurafrique' that was symbolized by the technocratic wonders of hydroelectric dams, jet aircraft, fast automobiles, and futuristic hospitals and schools.

In late 1956 and early 1957 Lacoste and Paye had placed the abolition of the decrepit *commune mixte* and *caidat* system, and its replacement by a new communal reform, as the lynchpin of a global political and economic modernization of Algeria.[1] A major problem was how to eliminate the old system of indirect rule by the *caids*, almost the sole machinery of the state in the isolated interior, and to promote a new class of Algerian and European representatives that could stand in future elections, but at the same time ensure that the new *communes* system was not simply recolonized by the old guard of exploitative *caids*, field guards, and *colon* mayors that would kill in the bud any 'revolutionary' change.

In two circulars of 29 October and 3 December 1956 Lacoste directed how, given the growing state of insecurity and FLN terrorism, local elections were to be suspended, and in the interim the administration and army were to select, in the zone of the former CM, men of character and 'natural authority', who could lead the *Délégations spéciales*.[2] Lacoste gave 1 January 1957 as the date for closing down the former CM administration and *caidat*, and the transfer of selected personnel into the new sub-prefectures and *communes* or delegations. But this transition, during a moment when the ALN advance seemed unstoppable, was a high-risk strategy, and as the IGAME of Algiers remarked, the disappearance of

[1] The key administrative reform was introduced by a series of decrees and orders during 1956; see C. Collot, *Institutions*, 137–50.

[2] AOM 1K/886/2, Lacoste circular to IGAME, 29 October; Lacoste to Salan, 3 December 1956.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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existing structures 'gives rise to the fear of at least a momentary rupture of the classic political and administrative networks'.[3]

There is surprisingly little trace in the archives as to how the new administrative order that began to develop during 1956, including the expansion of the SAS, was able to replace the existing *caid* system, in particular in relation to contact with the fractions that were crucial to the maintenance of civil registers, tax collection, and intelligence gathering. The SAS, created by Soustelle in September 1955, was regarded by Algiers as the new body of officers that would, rather like the old *Bureaux arabes*, step into this role, at least during a transition period. The official image of the SAS, that has been reinforced in the memoirs of many retired officers, is of a dynamic organization of dedicated men that would sweep away the debris of the archaic *caidal* order and pioneer a grassroots transformation of the economy and social welfare in the *bled*. While there were a few remarkable soldier-administrators, the majority were mediocre, and totally ill-prepared for life in the *douars*. During a meeting between the prefect of Orleansville and General de Brebisson in about September 1956, they were in agreement as to the appalling situation of the SAS in the military ZOA, where there were only seventeen officers, of whom only five were judged fit for purpose, nine as mediocre, and three were to be removed. So few SAS officers were in place that some had to administer up to four *douars*, with populations of up to 35,000.[4]

The question of the role of the SAS in Algeria requires further research, but the archives for the Chelif region suggest that the SAS officers, suddenly pitched into an isolated rural zone, far from initiating a new raft of developmental reforms, simply picked up on the expertise of the technical departments in the prefecture concerned with road, water and irrigation, housing, electrification, the SIP, and agriculture, and largely continued with programmes that had been developed by the PACs. This underlying continuity also applied to the question of policing and security, and the SAS officers attempting to gather intelligence on their *douars* were forced to rely on the same local notables, the fraction *kebirs*, 'ex-*caids*', and *grandes familles*, that had served the CM system. In other words the SAS was inevitably sucked into the complex power-relations of the clans and interest groups, and often reproduced the system of dependency on patrimonial local élites that they were claiming to sweep away in the construction of a 'New Algeria'. To complicate matters further Servier and the 5th Bureau in Orleansville attacked the entire SAS system, and argued for their demotion in favour of the parallel system of secret Arzew agents that were to lead the new *commune* system under the direction of the OIs. This triggered an angry response from the prefect of Orleansville, who held authority over the SAS as civil, not military, agents. Overall,

[3] AOM 1K/886/2, report IGAME of Algiers, on *reforme administrative* [undated].

[4] AOM 12CAB155, note by prefect of Orleansville, undated, about September 1956; see G. Mathias, *Les sections*, 30–1, on the problems of recruitment and low morale among the SAS.

the Lacoste government was playing a high-risk strategy in late 1956 and early 1957 by dissolving the remnants of the CM and *caidat* system, before there was an alternative and effective grassroots administrative system in place to assume responsibility for running the intelligence state.

The FLN response to communal reform, the assassination of Algerian notables who agreed to stand in the delegations, made it extremely difficult to locate potential candidates that at the same time needed to have basic literacy and leadership qualities. One response of Lacoste to this impasse, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was the secret plan to form cadres at Arzew, while another was to engage in a classic 'tribal' divide-and-rule or 'third-force' strategy, a contradictory policy that undermined the logic of political reform and economic modernization.[5]

Lacoste proclaimed that the whole purpose of the *commune* reform would be destroyed if the old guard, what he called the '*élites d'hier*', with their set conservative ways, was left in place. By February 1957 Lacoste was in a panic about the difficulty of implementing the communal reform, and feared that the rapid advance of the maquis and OPA structure was setting the pace and successfully forming the attitudes of the peasantry before the new French *communes* could become active. He ordered Salan to accelerate the revolutionary warfare offensive in order to win what he called 'the battle of the *communes*'. But he also suspected that, while the installation of the new delegations seemed to be advancing well, in reality it was already being undermined by the survival of the 'old political groups that this country no longer wants'.[6] There was much evidence from across Algeria that the old *caidat* élite, as well as the conservative, and often racist, European mayors and councillors, were quietly filtering back to monopolize the rural delegations.

The contradictions of the Algiers government in its declared ambition to replace the conservative old-guard that placed a dead-hand on plans for modernization is revealed in a secret survey carried out by the prefects on the order of the *Sûreté nationale* in June 1958. The object was to identify the '*nouvelles élites musulmanes*' in each *arrondissement* and to place them individually into one of four categories: new élites that had appeared during the 'events', the 'old élite' that remained faithful to France, élites that had proved unreliable but could still be recuperated, and those to be 'definitively eliminated' as pro-FLN. The 245 individuals identified in the department of Orleansville as active or potential collaborators with the French consisted largely of an aged cohort, among them numerous army veterans, holders of the *Légion d'Honneur*, former *caids* and

[5] A third force strategy was one in which the state sought to nurture, often in secrecy, a political movement that could serve as a magnet to opposition forces that could divide and weaken the FLN, while pretending to be independent of the colonial government.

[6] AOM 1K/886/2, Lacoste to Salan, IGAME, prefects and sub-prefects, 21 February 1957.

aghas, *djemâa* presidents, field guards, and *marabouts* that were appreciated for their influence with the local population.[7] The survey is revealing of the extent to which Algiers, even after the military coup of 13 May 1958, was still dependent on an intermediary Algerian class of notables to administer the rural population, and the shear paucity of potential candidates with the desired literacy, energy, skills, and loyalty to assist with a programme of dynamic modernization.

This chapter sets out to examine how it was that the colonial government's ambition to carry out a major reform of rural Algeria, a programme of political and economic modernization, was constantly blunted by the extraordinary tenacity and durability of the traditional patrimonial order, forms of 'neo-tribalism' that, in a deeply contradictory way, were directly or indirectly sustained by the disciples of revolutionary warfare. That tenacity was, in itself, evidence of the enormous, unyielding weight of peasant organizations that the colonial administration and military were barely able to deflect or mould to their own ends.

As a starting point I look at the evidence in Servier's ideological position of an underlying tension between a modernist and conservative vision of the Algerian question, a variant of the Berber myth that he shared with other influential figures in the 5th Bureau like Feaugas. Jean Servier, following in the footsteps of his father André, an influential anti-Islamic writer and ideologue, believed that the Arab and Islamic invasion of the seventh century had driven the autochthonous Berber population into the mountains. The great mistake of the French conquest, from the very beginning, claimed Jean Servier, had been to continue the Turkish system of rural government through the *caids*, *bachagas*, and *aghas*, a feudal élite that had literally enslaved the Berber peasantry, and continued to dominate them as the 'lords of the land' that had been encouraged to retain political power through corrupt elections. The ideological hold of the landed gentry was reinforced by Islam, which held the population in mental chains through the superstitious beliefs of *maraboutism*, and inherently reactionary Koranic law symbolized, for example, by the inhuman and degraded position of women.

While Servier strongly attacked, as did the 5th Bureau in general, the racism and opportunism of the provincial *colons*, he rarely mentioned European colonialism in itself as a contributing factor in the crisis facing Algeria, but rather saw the solution to the conflict by a concerted drive by Republican modernity to sweep away the Arabo-Muslim stranglehold that, rather perversely, the colonial state had reinforced by accepting the expansion of *Ulema* schools and installing feudal '*grandes familles*' in the Algiers and regional assemblies. The FLN, he claimed, was a numerically small movement of urban bourgeoisie and disaffected intellectuals, an expression of pan-Arab forces, that, far from aiming to liberate the

[7] AOM 1K/1179, *renseignements généraux*, Orleansville, 12 July 1958, 'Détermination des nouvelles élites musulmanes'.

people, would after independence simply step into the shoes of the exploitative class of big landowners.

Like Feaugas and Montagne in Morocco during the late 1940s, Servier shared a variant of the Berber myth, one that analysed the crisis of decolonization less through a class analysis than in cultural-ethnic terms of a geo-political divide between Arab-Islamic nationalism that was incubating in the urban centres, and a pure mountain people that had kept alive the ancient, millennial culture of the Mediterranean world, including the democratic political organization of the village assembly. For Servier, the revolutionary transformation of colonial Algeria that he was seeking would come about through the demographically dominant, but politically marginalized, peasantry: 'The people of Algeria are peasants', he remarked, 'the revolution led by France must be agrarian'.[8]

To the old guard administrators of the *Affaires indigènes* tradition, like Paul Schoen of the SLNA, that since the nineteenth century had managed the system of indirect rule by constantly fine-tuning the balance of power between the *grandes familles* by granting or withdrawing rewards, Servier and Lucien Paye appeared like dangerous and ruthless modernizers that sought to sweep away the stable, finely adjusted mechanisms of control.

Servier's writings read like those of a classic secular rationalist of the Third Republic, keen to sweep away all forms of clericalism and feudalism, what he termed the 'outdated social structures', in the interests of an age of enlightenment and scientific progress.[9] The clearest sign of the battle against religious obscurantism was the campaign of Paye and Servier to 'emancipate' Algerian women from the stifling grip of conservative Islam. Paye supported the creation of a commission to reform Muslim family law, 'audacious reforms will disrupt the framework of an outmoded way of life, so as to adapt it as quickly as possible to the rules of modern life'.[10] Servier built this into his master plan for *Pilote* 1 by supporting 'a campaign against prejudice and religious fanaticism', the 'liberation of women', and the creation within the new *djemâa* organization of a woman's committee. Such a programme would, he claimed, wrong-foot the FLN since, as a movement that was closely tied to the *Ulema*, it would be unable to take a strong stance in criticizing current Islamic culture and laws.[11]

However, while Servier cast himself as a radical, keen to shatter the structures and values of traditional society, from another perspective he was a conservative who sought to preserve the old order. He followed the long-established, conventional Berber myth, that the traditional *djemâa* assembly, in particular at the level

[8] J. Servier, *Demain*, 92, 140. [9] J. Servier, *Demain*, 11.
[10] AOM 12CAB201, L. Paye, *note d'orientation au sujet du statut de la femme musulmane*, 3 September 1956.
[11] SHD 1H2536/1, J. Servier, *Organisation politique de base*.

of the fraction, had preserved intact the ancient democratic organization and culture of the mountain people, and could form the basis of the new *commune* reforms.[12] More surprising than this, Servier argued that economic development did not have to come about through large-scale industrialization, capital investment, and the mechanization of farming, but could be achieved through the revival of artisan skills in rural areas, and the return of vast zones of appropriated communal land and forest to the village to be managed by traditional techniques.[13] Servier was thus seeking, in a radical or utopian way, to preserve or reinvigorate the ancient culture of the Berbers that, during his ethnological fieldwork between 1949 and 1954, he had seen as tragically threatened from two directions. First, like Montagne and the cultural pessimists of the *Cité Dieu* movement like Feaugas, modern capitalism and 'mass society', usually associated with Americanization, was seen as a process that was dissolving traditional family and community organization, leading to social chaos, anarchy, and revolution.[14] It was important, they claimed, to stabilize rural society, to inoculate it against the advance of revolutionary atheism, and in particular to protect the peasant family from 'the disintegration of the human social cell'.[15] Secondly, Servier, as did Feaugas in Morocco in the late 1940s, saw nationalism as an ethnic Arab phenomenon that had penetrated, like an alien force, from the urban centres into the mountain zones where it had corrupted Berber youth, mainly in the form of a radical puritanism.[16]

One of the contradictions in Servier's position on modernization and the reinforcement of peasant Berber traditionalism, an ambiguity that can be found throughout the civil and military authorities, was that it opened the door to supporting forms of neo-tribalism and strategies of divide-and-rule that, while working with the grain of rural society and its patrimonial relations, undermined the key object of Lacoste's reforms, to make a clear break with the conservative and archaic forces that had for too long locked Algeria into a cycle of underdevelopment. The remaining part of this chapter sets out to examine this issue mainly in relation to the Ouarsenis region, through three interrelated topics: the 'third force' strategy that involved the formation of the *harka* under the *bachaga* Boualam, the associated secret service support of the warlord 'Kobus', and support for the revival of conservative forms of *marabout* culture. The recourse by the

[12] J. Servier, *Demain*, 96.

[13] J. Servier, *Demain*, 131: 'This does not involve a revolution, but a return to the old system of ownership of grain lands such as existed before from one end of the Mediterranean to the other.'

[14] Like many of his generation during the 1950s, Servier associated urban youth culture in Algiers, the wearing of jeans, etc., as a sign of juvenile delinquency and the moral decay of urban modernity.

[15] J. Servier, *Demain*, 169.

[16] J. Servier, *Dans l'Aurès*, 8–9, 138, during fieldwork before the 1954 revolution: 'I recognized their most fierce partisans from the fact that they refused my cigarettes and did not drink coffee.' He was about to the record a rare stone inscription in the lost language of the Berbers when nationalists destroyed it, declaiming, '"Our Berber past is dead, we wish to be Arabs"'.

French military to so-called 'proxy wars', the deployment of warlords, proved to be as catastrophic during *Opération Pilote* as it had throughout the history of colonial 'small wars'.[17] The deployment of the third force strategy in the Ouarsenis during 1957 to 1958, in contradiction with the hearts and minds agenda, was an indication of the extent to which senior military were frustrated at the inability to rapidly install the *djemâa amie* as the key linkage with the mountain population and fell back instead onto the traditional colonial manipulation of neo-tribal élites.

The *bachaga* Boualam and the *harki* in the *douar* Beni Boudouane

The main *Pilote* 1 operations during February to July of 1957 were largely confined to the Dahra north of the Chelif valley, while the key fortress of the ALN, the great massif of the Ouarsenis to the south, was cordoned off as a zone that came under the control of the French secret service and special forces of the parachute regiments (11th choc). The prefect of Orleansville and the commander of the ZOA constantly reported their frustration that completing the 'pacification' of the Dahra was impossible since, during the intense military operations of *Pilote* 1, the ALN *katibas* simply slipped away into the refuge of the Ouarsenis, biding their time before returning north into the Dahra. Frustration was compounded by the fact that the prefecture and the *État-major mixte* were kept in the dark about the top-secret operations in the Ouarsenis, and conventional forces were strictly excluded from what was referred to as the 'private hunting grounds' of the Boualam-Kobus operations.[18]

The *bachaga* Boualam received exceptional media attention after the elimination of the communist Red Maquis on 5 June 1956, and, along with his loyal *harkis* soldiers, became an emblem of the deep and faithful support of the Algerian people for *Algérie française*. For the SDECE and the parachutists of the 11th choc that had a long tradition of partisan warfare in mountainous zones, most recently in Indochina, Boualam offered an ideal opportunity to harness a peasant 'tribal' resistance to reinforce counter-guerrilla operations in the very heart of the vast Ouarsenis massif. During late 1956 Boualam and his small *harkis* force was receiving support from the SAS Captain Conill, based in Lamartine, but with the start of the Pilote 1 project the secret service brought in Pierre Hentic,

[17] Martyn Kitzen, 'Between Treaty and Treason: Dutch Collaboration with Warlord Teuka Uma during the Aceh War, a Case Study on the Collaboration with Indigenous Power-holders in Colonial Warfare', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 23.1 (2012), 93–116; on Afghanistan, see the special edition of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39.4 (2011), 551–606.

[18] SHD 1H2536, Feaugas to General de Brebisson, 7 February 1957, notes that he had forbidden even Captains Gyomar and Stien of his team, then on tour near Carnot, from going into the Beni Boudouane.

a specialist in third force operations, to act as liaison officer and controller of the Boualam forces.[19]

Hentic had a long experience of organizing counter-guerrilla operations in Vietnam and from April 1951 to July 1953 was head of the special forces commandos working with the Montagnards Hrés tribesmen against the Vietminh.[20] In May 1956 Hentic had been posted to the *Zone opérationnelle de Kabylie*, to investigate and assert a better control over the mysterious 'Force K', where he worked closely with Servier. After closure of the catastrophic 'third force' operation *Oiseau bleu* he followed Servier to the Chelif, where they collaborated in the installation and training of the Boualam *harkis*.[21]

On his appointment as commander of the sub-quarter of Beni Boudouane on 1 February 1957, which was coordinated with the installation of the Servier-Feaugas HQ in Orleansville, Hentic set to work to assess the state of the two hundred men that had been drafted into the Boualam *harkis*. He immediately uncovered a sorry state of affairs since the attempt by Captain Conill, who had first supported the *harkis*, to gain the input of high-quality French officers to train and lead the units, had been ignored.[22] As a consequence the Boualam *harkis*, along with those of 'Kobus', had been left to their own devices, and were exposed, as Hentic remarked, to an almost inevitable process of disintegration and 'FLN political infiltration and desertions due to a lack of strong, hierarchical leadership and lack of constant combat experience'. While he thought that the men were, at least for the moment, pro-French this was due to the personal influence of Boualam who was able to use government pay and subsidies to keep them loyal, but this was quite shallow since they had no, 'deep political ties'. Boualam was asking that his men be better equipped with modern weapons to confront the ALN, but Hentic was clearly concerned not to repeat the *Oiseau bleu* disaster of the previous October in which the Iflissen GAD had defected with three hundred

[19] Pierre Hentic, *Tant*, 181, Hentic was posted to the Ouarsenis on 1 February 1957. The military intervention in the Ouarsenis in 1957 remains difficult to research because of the secrecy still surrounding the operations, but Hentic's book and papers, edited by his family after his death in 2004, provide an important source.

[20] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 11–120, on his experience of jungle warfare in Indochina.

[21] The general term '*harkis*', which Servier rejected as a pejorative or racist category, was replaced by '*combattants*', and covered a range of auxiliary or *supplétifs* units fighting with the French. SHD 1H2536, Servier, *note sur l'emploi des musulmans dans l'armée*, 3 September 1957, identified four categories, those soldiers attached to a regular army unit (*tirailleurs*, *spahis*), the *Groupes mobiles de police rurale* (GMPA), the *mokhaznis* attached to the SAS, and the *supplétifs* (*harkis*). To complicate matters, there existed the unpaid, peasant civilians, armed with shotguns, that formed static *Groupes d'autodéfenses* (GAD) in the villages, many of them army veterans. This chapter is mainly concerned with the *supplétifs*, for which I keep the term *harkis*, that formed small fighting units of about fifty Algerians under one or two European officers, paid and equipped by the army. There exists a considerable literature on the auxiliaries ; see Michel Roux, *Les harkis, les oubliés de l'histoire 1954–1991* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991) ; Mohand Hamoumou, *Et ils sont devenus harkis*; François-Xavier Hautreux, *La guerre d'Algérie des harkis 1954–1962* (Paris: Perrin, 2013) ; and a special edition of *Les Temps Modernes* 666 (2015), *Harkis 1962–2012. Les myths et les faits*.

[22] Hentic report to General de Brebisson, 6 February 1957, text in P. Hentic, *Tant*, 168–71.

guns. 'In the present circumstances the refusal to issue arms presents a real danger, but to agree to it is equally dangerous'.[23] Hentic was confronted by a dilemma that faced officers throughout Algeria, how to win the trust and improve the morale of auxiliaries, while simultaneously subjecting them to what appeared to be discriminatory security checks.[24]

Throughout the *Pilote* operation Hentic and Servier, working closely together, placed strong pressure on the senior military, among them General de Brebisson and his successor General Renaud, that commanded the ZOA, to carry out a major restructuring and investment in the Boualam *harkis*. In August, as *Pilote* 1 was being wound down, Hentic sent another damning report to Renaud in which he noted that none of his recommendations had been followed up, and after three 'more or less chaotic years, we quit this stagnating zone at the risk of watching it slowly disintegrate or being warn down by the rebel blows. . . . It's an illusion to think that its possible to create a valuable *harkis* unit, loyal, trained, disciplined, combative, in handing over shotguns and a pittance to some more or less volunteer French-Muslims'.[25]

Hentic identified a key problem with the *harkis* system, both in the Ouarsenis as elsewhere, that senior commanders jealously guarded the most able officers for their own HQ teams, while few cadres were prepared to volunteer to lead *harkis* units that were regarded with professional disdain as third rate, poorly equipped, and highly dangerous, and that also represented a bad career move since junior officers stood every chance of failure, while their isolation meant that hard work and any success would receive no recognition from superiors. The *harkis* tended to be led by unexperienced or incapable junior officers that were demoralized and wished to get posted back to more comfortable and safer units as soon as possible.

Jean Servier collaborated closely with Hentic, whom he much admired for his derring-do actions, and shared his ambitions to see a major restructuring of the *harkis*, so that they could become an efficient, well-equipped fighting force, integrated into the mainstream army, and that could eventually replace French units that could be gradually withdrawn. Between late June and early September 1957 Servier wrote three reports in which he proposed that all the '*harkis*' in Algeria, to be renamed *Compagnies* or *Unités légères*, would be rescued from their second-rate status, and provided with a new statutory framework, overseen by a national General Inspectorate, that would provide standard conditions of pay and promotion, family and rehousing allowances, and modern equipment.[26] It was

[23] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 169. [24] F.-X. Hautreux, *La guerre*, 207–30.

[25] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 169, Hentic report to General Renaud, 7 August 1957.

[26] Servier's three reports are AOM 12CAB107, Servier to Lacoste 27 June, and '*bilan*' on *Opération Pilote*, 20 July; SHD 1H2536, *note sur l'emploi des musulmans dans l'armée*, 3 September 1957. Wages were to be set initially at 500 fr per day, that of an agricultural worker, from which 200 was deducted for food. Later this could increase to 650 fr and 1,000 for sergeants. The close detail of such costings was vital to Servier's campaign since he sought to demonstrate that the *Unités légères* would be cheaper than other *supplétifs*, like the GMPR and SAS *mokhaznis*, that he proposed should be replaced.

vital, and Hentic agreed, that the *harkis* should be provided with a strong sense of pride through the provision of good quality uniforms and, in particular, modern weapons, rather than the defective old shotguns that were usually distributed.

Servier, who disposed of significant secret service funds, was able to achieve some of these goals during *Pilote* 1, and was able to refer to this successful testing in seeking a global reform of the Algerian *harkis*. His *Pilote* 1 accounts show in close detail how, in addition to a huge array of funding, from schools, tents, and medical teams to informers and propaganda equipment, he approved a standard list of clothing for every soldier, and ordered a major consignment of new shotguns from manufacturers in Chatellerault and St Etienne.[27] It was crucial, Servier argued, to recruit *harkis*, as far as possible, from among married men who would be attracted by family allowances, and encouraged to move from outlying *gourbis* into houses constructed alongside army posts, to protect their families and also to provide a 'guarantee' that the auxiliaries would not desert to the FLN.[28] Establishing a modern *harkis* force was seen as crucial to winning the rural population over as loyal supporters of the New Algeria, 'an army of democratically led peasants, politically educated and fighting alongside our units'.[29]

To the great frustration of Servier and Hentic, such a rational modernization of the *harkis* in the Ouarsenis, and throughout Algeria as a whole, was to fail for two reasons, the political decision of the colonial state not to invest the necessary financial and human resources, and the survival of the patrimonial authority of a 'neo-tribal' élite. Both Servier and Hentic were forced, from about August 1957, to leave the Ouarsenis by being posted elsewhere, and Hentic, although he appears to have remained officially in charge of the Boualam forces until 1959, finally resigned his position with a bitter denunciation of the military failure to reform the auxiliaries. In his final report Hentic remarked that the *harkis* in the Beni Boudouane had an enormous potential, 'one of the best cards that we hold in order to keep Algeria'. But this opportunity had been squandered since, while the Boualam *harkis* had been expanded from 200 in early 1957 to 458 in 1959, it had still not been restructured with the assistance of capable French officers, and the entire force risked passing over to the FLN. This would represent an enormous defeat for France, 'a definitive defeat for us, a brilliant victory for the rebellion'.[30] Hentic concluded that his reforming mission was impossible, and he was not

[27] AOM 9140/47, *Fonds spéciaux M. Servier*, includes detailed accounts, including the chequebook stubs, drawn on the prefect of Orleansville account no. 267 in October 1957 for eight millions to a Chatellerault manufacturer. AOM 9140/175, prefect to Lacoste, 25 October 1957, demanded of Servier that hunting rifles acquired from St Etienne at a cost of ten millions be handed over to the army ZOA.

[28] Servier proposed family allowances at 1,000 fr. a month per person, up to a maximum of ten individuals. The allowance was extremely low, but for a married man with four children would represent an extra third to his basic wage. *Harkis* were to be allowed 10,000 fr. towards house construction, and many posts were surrounded by their thatched *gourbis*.

[29] SHD 1H2536, *note sur l'emploi des musulmans dans l'armée*, 3 September 1957.

[30] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 171, resignation letter of 1959.

prepared to be associated with another catastrophe, like that of *Oiseau bleu* and 'Kobus', that both terminated in the passing of huge numbers of weapons and ammunition into the hands of the enemy.

So far we can see how Servier and Hentic were associated with a modernizing agenda in which the goal was to integrate peasant combatants into an up-to-date counter-guerrilla force that was regulated by rational, bureaucratic structures, one important component of a more general assimilation into the 'New Algeria'. However, both men in supporting the activities of the *bachaga* Boualam were, in a contradictory way, complicit in sustaining the traditional forms of clan and fraction organization, the values of patrimonialism that the government reforms were attempting to replace. Part of the problem here derived from a deeply entrenched practice of the colonial army and state in nurturing army veterans. Ever since the extension of obligatory military service to Algerian males in 1912, there existed a deep anxiety among Europeans that conscripts, once demobilized, would turn their military skills to banditry or revolutionary movements.[31] The colonial state sought to contain this threat through elaborate, paternalist policies and surveillance mechanisms for *ancien combattants* that were coordinated by the central ministries, and at the local level by sub-prefects, CM administrators, mayors, and army commanders.

A strategy of special targeted support for demobilized soldiers became an urgent priority as thousands of experienced combatants returned from the European theatre in 1945 to find that militant nationalism was spreading like a bush fire, while their villages were facing famine conditions and, in the north Constantinois, unparalleled levels of state repression. Within days of the Sétif massacres Colonel Spillman drew up a report in which he noted that Algerian soldiers, while organized in their army units, had remained loyal, but on demobilization were suddenly plunged into a deepening rural crisis and reduced to a 'proletarian' poverty. Traditionally the veterans had played a key role in the French political control of North Africa, and now there was an urgent need to 'pay particular attention to them, to support and favour them, to make them privileged citizens, without which they will become prey to nationalist propaganda'.[32] The colonial state deployed a complex network of funding and resources to maintain veteran loyalty, including the construction of *Dar-el-Askri*, special welfare bureaux and social centres, relatively generous pensions, access to adult education and apprenticeships, rest homes for the wounded, housing grants, hand-outs of food and clothing, and priority in the distribution of much-prized licences to drive taxis, to own shotguns, and to open Arab cafés.[33]

[31] G. Meynier, *L'Algérie révélée*.

[32] ANP F/60/839, Colonel Spillman, General Secretary of the *Comité de l'Afrique du Nord* to de Gaulle's Cabinet, 22 May 1945.

[33] Much of the support network in the Chelif region was managed by the national association *Amitiés africaines* established in May 1938. In the late 1940s local committees and Dar-el-Askri existed

At each occasion that the administration and army faced the prospect of a security crisis in the Chelif they turned to reinvigorate or expand the army veteran associations. After the earthquake of 9 September 1954 (see Chapter 12)), a departmental inspector travelled through the disaster zone and began to organize civil and military relief that would target and prioritize the ruined Dar-el-Askri. This programme was all the more urgent since the inspector had seen PPA vehicles delivering supplies in the interior, and Coutelin, the deputy sub-prefect, had emphasized 'the need to do more for the ex-servicemen, enticed by suspect propagandists that have large and spectacular means'.[34] The insurrection of 1 November 1954 further increased the anxiety and, in the Chelif region, where there existed little in the way of terrorism before 1956, the security concerns focused on the return of Algerian soldiers from the Vietminh camps who were not only hardened fighters, but had often a direct experience of communist guerrilla strategies and French counterinsurgency techniques that could be applied to the Algerian theatre. During 1955 the administrator of the CM of Cherchell closely tracked up to thirty newly released prisoners of war that had returned from Indochina, ensuring that each individual was placed under close surveillance, that they had settled back into a normal life, and were properly cared for in terms of administrative assistance, access to pensions, and other benefits.[35]

Ex-servicemen did not only represent a group in rural society that was managed through a system of rewards, but perhaps more significantly they formed a key political role in the indirect rule of rural society. Because the army veterans were conversant in French, and had a long experience of bureaucratic organization and western culture, they were actively recruited into the *commune mixte* system as *caids*, field guards, interpreters, police agents, and auxiliaries. The colonial state was crucially dependent on the ex-servicemen cadres, who also formed the bodyguards of the *grandes familles*, to manage the most isolated mountainous zones that were beyond the reach of European administrators.[36] The power of

in Orleansville, Ténès, Affreville, Duperré, and Miliana, and were spreading into the rural zones, at Molière, Bou Caid, and Carnot: see N. Aggoun, 'La résistance', 392–4. AOM 91/1K1231, *Monographie politique*, CM of Braz, February 1953, noted a census carried out of veterans, and their widows and orphans, in seven *douars* of the east Braz, numbering 4,264 individuals. Their associations 'form, in effect, a solid support for the rural population'.

[34] ANP 1K703, report inspector '*Amitiés africaines*' for department of Algiers, 14 October 1954.

[35] AOM 1K/418, monthly reports of CM administrator for January to November 1955. Fears about the potential dangers offered by veterans from Indochina were well grounded since numerous men from Vietnam soon appeared in the ranks of the FLN guerrilla forces. To cite one example, see *Echo d'Alger*, 14 November 1956, on the arrest of Mohamed Bentaleb from a relatively well-to-do family from Affreville, who joined the army in 1950 at the age of 19, served in Indochina until April 1954, and after demobilization in February 1956 immediately joined the maquis, serving as second-in-command to 'Si Larbi'. On Bentaleb see Chapter 14, p. 298.

[36] AOM 1K/418, report CM administrator Cherchell, August 1955, noted that veterans 'remain still the most reliable guarantors of our cause, and in the *douars* constitute the most solid elements on whom we can rely'.

these networks, and their ability to reach into, and to mobilize peasants in, the isolated rural communities, was constantly demonstrated in the endless round of official parades and commemorations during which medalled veterans lined up to receive food, blankets, clothing, and, after 1954, ancient, and often defective shotguns.

The Communist Party and Messalists, perfectly aware of this political function, created their own veterans associations. The miner Djilali Bounamaa, who later became commander of *wilaya* 4, created a branch of the radical *Association des anciens combattants français musulmans* at Molière Bou Caid in April 1954, while the communist militant, Dr Masseboeuf, was elected president of the *Association* at Ténès in early 1948.[37]

After 1945 a growing gap and political tension appeared between an older generation of veterans, many of whom had seen service during the First World War and the 1920s and 1930s, the loyal pro-French caste that monopolized the rewards and posts of the official veteran system, and the young cohort that after the European campaigns rapidly passed into the PPA and the clandestine OS.[38] After 1 November 1954 the rapid growth in support for the FLN guerrilla movement was in part fuelled by young men in their 20s who were resentful towards the old guard, and in particular the *anciens combattants*, that monopolized the posts in the lower rungs of rural local government, as well as the money, food, and other perks that flowed towards their families, or were used to manipulate micro-clientele systems and political influence.[39] As the different types of auxiliary were expanded rapidly during the Algerian War their main recruiting base, from auto-defense to *harkis*, was among the veterans already organized through the various local associations and who played a key role in the fraction *djemâa*.

The ALN guerrilla forces targeted such 'collaborator' veterans that played a major role in the *caidat* system, and sought to turn or assassinate them. A typical instance occurred late on the night of 5 October 1957 when an ALN unit of nine men surrounded the house of Mohamed Belkebir outside the walls of Miliana, a 49-year-old retired adjutant, ex-prisoner of war, and manager of the Dar-el-Askri.

[37] AOM 4i209, monthly report of CM administrator of Ténès, February 1948. The position of president 'gives him influence over the Muslim *anciens combattants* in the *douars* so that he can more easily spread his political propaganda and recruit members of the PCA'.

[38] Many future FLN leaders had served in the French army, among them Ben Bella and Djillali Belhadj ('Kobus'). AOM 1K/354 CM Chelif, monthly report 2 February 1954, statistics of *Conseil de revision de la classe 1954*, shows that of 2,719 young men enrolled as due for conscription, after subtraction of those exempted and unsuitable, some 523 were called up. This represented about a fifth (19 per cent) of the year-group, a figure that points to the large impact of national service on rural society.

[39] Paul and M.-C. Villatoux, *La république*, 469, in a CHEAM study of 1959 Captain Jean Roué noted how the veterans of the Dar-el-Askri received all the support and attention, while work with the youths, who had been abandoned, was now far more difficult than with 'the docile masses of the *anciens combattants*'.

Belkebir, who held French citizenship and made no attempt to disguise his strong pro-French opinions, was widely disliked because of his irascible nature, always seeking disputes with neighbours, and for demanding a *bakhchiche* when creating an official dossier for the registration of ex-servicemen. Raised from sleep, Belkebir was marched barefoot through the mountains towards Affreville, and next day his body was found, his throat cut, with a signed, FLN stamped note attached, 'FLN-ALN—Condemned, executed, traitor to the Fatherland'.[40]

Returning to Servier and Hentic, it should be emphasized that their failure to modernize the *harkis* system came about not only because of inertia or opposition of the higher command, but also because it was difficult, if not impossible, to dismantle the *caidat* networks since, especially at the fraction level, there were no alternative leaders to manage the intelligence networks. The *bachaga* Boualam *harkis* provides evidence of this tension between reforming ambitions, and the survival of traditionalism. In April 1959 Hentic identified a total of five hundred to six hundred *harkis* operating in the Beni Boudouane, 115 in the personal retinue of the *bachaga*, and the rest mainly in five companies of about sixty men each that were located near the Oued Fodda dam and in three isolated posts in the core of the *douar* at Moulay Abdelkader, Dra Messaoud, and Bel Has.[41] On his resignation Hentic detailed the impossible task of knocking the *harkis* into shape since, instead of at least the twenty-five European non-commissioned officers required for the task, there were only ten inexperienced, depressed men who wished to leave. Hentic was also frustrated by what may be termed the neo-tribal organization in the Beni Boudouane in which the *bachaga* exercised a jealous personal 'protection' over what he described as 'his people', which blocked any attempt to reform the companies into disciplined units. Many of the *harkis*, who were also resistant to being controlled by anyone other than their 'patron', instead of constituting regular units in a base continued to receiving their wages while living in scattered *gourbis*, from time to time appearing shotgun in hand for a ceremony or operation. Hentic's proposal was to cut back the overinflated and costly *harkis* force by about a half through a clearing-out (*épuration*) of the physically aged and ill-disciplined, and replacing them with three companies led by effective European sergeants.

The *bachaga*'s recruitment of a supernumerary *harkis* force was motivated by his drive to extend his social and political power through patronage, and he was reluctant to see his clientele system eroded by Hentic. Boualam's careful nurturing of his personal support base in the Beni Boudouane was reflected in his pre-1954 organization of seasonal worker brigades. The colonial authorities were concerned that labour migration, especially to France and the big towns of the Algerian littoral, was placing simple and apolitical mountain peasants in touch with

[40] AOM 9140/5, *commissaire de police*, Miliana, 9 October 1957.
[41] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 161–4. A map with these locations can be found in B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 32–3.

dangerous communist, nationalist, and trade union movements which threatened to bring the virus of revolution back into the *douars*. The *bachaga* negotiated contracts for seasonal migrant workers to travel from the *douar* in large groups, under the watchful eye of foremen who kept them isolated from contact with potentially subversive influences. Every year four to five hundred men departed from the *douar* to harvest sugar beets in the Seine-et-Marne and Nord.[42] Boualam also organized a four- or five-year contract with a company running the huge vineyard estate at Kéroulis near Ain Temouchent in Oranie. In 1959 477 men from Beni Boudouane arrived for the grape harvest, under the supervision of six foremen, and in the evenings they found entertainment by organizing their own celebrations, '*ouada*' in honour of their patron saint, the *marabout* Sidi Abdelkader.[43] Boualam was able to reinforce his political clientele base by bringing much needed revenue back into the impoverished *douar*, but even more so by the highly valued daily wages of the *harkis* that could be added to the subsistence economy of the family farm.

There exists less archival evidence on Jean Servier's regulation of the Boualam *harkis* during 1957 to early 1958, but in general he cooperated closely with Hentic. The ethnologist, who detested the *caidat*, certainly agreed with a planning document for *Pilote* 1 that warned against the dangers of patronage networks: 'The setting up of "*harkas*", often the personal fiefdom of local chiefs, will not be tolerated because of the various abuses that almost naturally flow from it'.[44] However, Servier, perhaps more than Hentic, was caught in a contradictory position since he viewed the fraction as the essential key to the control of rural society and, in doing so, worked to support the *ferqa* and *djemâa* as the natural base of political authority, a position that served to reinforce the *harkas* of Boualam.[45] There existed a distinct danger that the ethnologist was working to reinforce the patrimonial structures of peasant society that were blocking a transition to modern individualism.

[42] B. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 105–6. On the contract system, see CAOM 1K/354 monthly reports of *commune mixte* of Chelif, January, March, April, and September 1954. In general Algerian migrant workers preferred urban and industrial centres to agricultural labour, so Boualam was helping to supply isolated rural areas that found it difficult to recruit workers.

[43] M. Launay, *Paysans algériens*, 78, 81–2.

[44] AOM 12CAB107, this undated, anonymous report, '*note sur l'organisation des groupes dits 'd'auto-defense et des formations de supplétifs*', is probably by Servier, and dates from about February–March 1957. S. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 196, confirms that the first *harkis* units were created on the basis of twenty to thirty men per fraction. SHD 1H2536/1, General de Brebisson to General Allard, 10 March 1957, warned against the offer of the *bachaga* Bentaieb to create his own *harkis*, since he was a cunning opportunist who had links to both the FLN and MNA. He provides a further example of a rich notable who, like Boualam, was seeking to raise a local force from among his estate workers and other political clientele.

[45] Y. Courrière, *La guerre*, 2.28, Servier told the journalist, 'I never recruit individuals but collective groups. I depend on this strong collective morale. . . . If the army recruited auxiliaries individually it would be chaotic'.

What Hentic defined as the chronic 'indiscipline' of the Boualam *harka* had major consequences in the battle against the advancing ALN. In his autobiographical works the *bachaga* painted a stereotypical picture of his paternal role in nurturing the people of his 'fief', simple but courageous peasants, who showed no interest in nationalist politics and had always remained loyal to him, and to France. It was a fundamental error of the Paris government, he claimed, to have sought to abolish the *caids*, 'and to undermine this traditional authority'.[46]

But, as Hentic concluded, the *bachaga* was largely an absentee from the Beni Bouadouane since he lived in a house in the plain near Lamartine and was so busy with his political affairs in Algiers and Paris that he had little contact with 'his' clients, apart from parades and ceremonial occasions. The lack of adequate military training and leadership of the *harkis* exposed them to a dangerous infiltration by the FLN, a process that was revealed through both captured documents, as well as checks by military security that showed a single *harki* company had passed 3,840 cartridges to the enemy in two months.[47] Some fraction heads had entered into secret negotiations with the FLN to reach agreement that they would make regular supplies to the guerrilla, on condition that they avoided their zone so as to leave it tranquil from military incursion.[48]

François-Xavier Hautreux claims that the *bachaga* Boualam was exceptional, and that his rule as a 'feudal' lord cannot be taken as typical of the situation in Algeria.[49] However, Boualam's authority as a neo-tribal lord, while it attracted unusual levels of publicity, at the same time provided an example of a widespread, if diffuse, system of clan-like, personal power. This can be seen in relation to both conservative *marabout* practices, as well as in a patch-work quilt of 'big man' assertions of personal authority at the micro-level, of which the prime example was the third force of 'Kobus'.

As we have seen the *bachaga* Boualam reinforced his charismatic authority as a traditional leader through his participation in the regional pilgrimage to the shrine of Moulay Abdelkader. From early in the war such pilgrimages, which had long been subject to administrative control, were banned for security reasons as they offered a vehicle or cover for nationalist propaganda. However, during 1957 there were signs of the SAS and military reviving the pilgrimages as a means to gain popular, rural support against the reformist *Ulema* and the FLN that had clamped down on *maraboutism*. In June 1957, for example, an annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Sidi Mohamed, south of Dupleix in the Dahra, was relaunched after a

[46] S. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 45, 107. He implies that as the later *harkis* companies were created under Hentic, the government, fearing the emergence of a 'force "Boualam"', removed his powers as commander.

[47] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 165. The entire zone was, he claimed, subject to a gradual '*noyautage politique*'. On the FLN infiltration into the *harkis*, see also F.-X. Hautreux, *La guerre*, 207–16.

[48] P. Hentic, *Tant*, 165.

[49] F.-X. Hautreux, *La guerre*, 133.

two-year ban, and attracted 1,500 people.[50] On 27 October 1957 the army and SAS of Warnier organized a great religious festival at Medjadja that was attended by 3,000, a pilgrimage to the shrine of Si M'Hamed ben Ali that was timed to mark 'the celebration of the pacification action in a *douar* that was totally controlled by the rebels eight months ago'.[51] There were many instances of this concerted revival of *maraboutism* by the army in the latter half of 1957, one of the most dramatic being the rituals of an ecstatic sect at Sidi Embarek near Maison Carré, recorded by the official photo-journalist Michalowski, during which, to the sound of rhythmic flutes and drums, devotees went into a trance and pierced their cheeks with skewers.[52] The army encouragement of *maraboutism*, in order to gain popular support among the peasantry, contradicted the government reform programme based on modernization, education, and the liberation of the masses from the irrational world of superstition and magic amulets that reinforced traditional conservative authorities.

Patrimonialism and the Warlord 'Kobus'

During the course of 1957 the French secret services (DST), backed by General Salan, supported three major third force movements against the FLN, that of Djilali Belhadj ('Kobus') in the Chelif region, and Mohammed Ben Lounis ('General Bellounis') and Larbi Cherif ('Si Cherif'), both located in the northern fringes of the Sahara south of Aumale (today Sour El Ghozlane). In each case the objectives and procedure was identical. By late 1956 the FLN was winning out in the violent civil war with the MNA, and the DST's aim was to support Messalist guerrilla forces, threatened with annihilation, by supplying them with money, equipment and arms, and the assistance of special force parachute units, like the 11th choc.[53] In the Ouarsenis, an important strategic point, the aim of the secret service was to reinforce the small Kobus maquis that occupied an east-west band of *douars* between Duperré and Oued Fodda and which formed a defensive barrier along the northern limits of the Beni Boudouane. Although the *harkis* of the *bachaga* Boualam and the 'Force K' of Kobus were separate and had different

[50] AOM 9140/78, prefect of Orleansville report on *Pilote* 1, 2 July 1957.

[51] AOM 9140/78, prefect of Orleansville report on *Pilote* 1, October 1957.

[52] ECPAD, ALG 57/370, report and photographs of Michalowski, 20 July 1957. On the rituals of Sidi Embarek at which a bull was sacrificed, see E. Dermenghem, *Le culte*, 268.

[53] Jacques Valette, *La guerre d'Algérie des Messalistes 1954–1962* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001); and 'Le Maquis Kobus, une manipulation ratée durant la guerre d'Algérie (1957–1958)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 191 (1998), 69–88; 'Un contre-maquis durable de la guerre d'Algérie. L'affaire Si Cherif (1957–1962)', *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 208.4 (2002), 7–34; Philippe Gaillard, *L'Alliance: la guerre d'Algérie de Général Bellounis, 1957–1958* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009); Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Une troisième force combattante pendant la guerre d'Algérie. L'armée nationale du peuple algérien en son chef le "général" Bellounis. Mai 1957–juillet 1958', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 85.321 (1998), 65–76.

liaison officers, Hentic and Lieutenant Heux, in practice they combined to form a strong defensive barrier that seriously impeded ALN movement between the Chelif valley, the Dahra, and the Ouarsenis.[54]

Djilali Belhadj (alias 'Kobus'), who came from a typical 'middle peasant' family of the Chelif piedmont that had a history of *caidal* power, was sentenced in 1951 to five years prison as a key OS leader. Recruited as an informer in prison he was released early in 1953 and was able to make his way back into the ranks of the PPA, providing intelligence to the French authorities. As the MNA in the Chelif region came under a full-scale assault by the FLN in 1956 it disintegrated into a number of small, autonomous bands that eventually rallied to the ALN or the 'Kobus' maquis. Si Ahmed Belkacem, for example, who led a group in the Attafs area, was assassinated by Kobus on 27 May 1957 and most of his followers were absorbed into force 'K'. The intelligence report on the fragmentation of the Messalists noted that the small volatile bands, usually composed of under twenty men armed with shotguns, rallied to stronger groups not along political or party lines, but by attachment to 'the person of the Chief'. Like free-booting bands in the medieval Hundred Years War, the autonomous groups, held together by the leadership skills or manipulative violence of the head, reflected the patrimonial values of petty warlords.

Two different types of 'third force' organizations can be identified, the local-defensive (Boualam and Si Cherif) and the expansionist-political (Bellounis, Kobus) movements. Si Cherif, located on the northern Saharan fringe, who rallied to the French during July 1957 with a small band of seventeen men and rapidly built up a force of a hundred auxiliaries, that restricted its activities to the armed defense of a few *douars*. Described by the prefect of Médéa as acting like a 'feudal lord in relation to his men' he, like Boualam, was able to gain support locally as long as he restricted his activity to the armed defence of the community by militias that did not wish to engage in guerrilla actions elsewhere, but to stay at home on their farms and mobilize for actions if and when the FLN encroached on the *douars*.[55] In exchange for his protection Si Cherif claimed the right to levy within the zone allocated to him by the French a tax on the inhabitants, to recruit fighters, and to traffic in livestock and grain that he sold commercially. Si Cherif was continuing to practice, but under the conditions of civil war, the age-old traditions of the *caids* and *djemâa* presidents, who cultivated a reciprocal patrimonial relationship with the fractions that balanced protection against external threats

[54] The highly secret 'Force K', that operated largely outside the conventional armed forces of the ZOA, remains today obscure in many respects, but CAOM 9140/47, the accounts for *Pilote* 1, show that secret service funds to Kobus were channelled through Servier, as with a payment of eight millions for June 1957. S. Boualam, *Mon pays*, 114–16, claims that the Beni Boudouane in barring the route was the bête noir of *wilaya* 4, and ALN units were forced to march an extra 150 kilometres to get round it. The ALN offered a bribe of 20 millions, later raised to 250 millions, for unimpeded access.

[55] J. Valette, 'Un contre-maquis', 19, 23.

against the right to extract wealth. Si Cherif, remarked General Salan, had created 'a political clientele'.[56] Jacques Valette argues that Si Cherif survived as a 'third force' leader to the end of the war, when he became a captain in the French army, unlike Kobus and Bellounis who were both killed in 1958, because he steered clear of wider political ambitions and restricted his aims to the concrete goal of defending 'a small region' and to 'protect their own people, their *mechtas*, their fields'.[57]

Si Cherif had much in common with the *bachaga* Boualam whose personal power-base in the *douar* Beni Boudouane rested on his ability to sustain a clientele base among the fractions that he protected through *harkis* recruitment and the not inconsiderable income that was generated through auxiliary wages and external migrant labour contracts. Boualam and his *harki* resisted Hentic's efforts to shape the ill-disciplined auxiliaries into efficient units of the French army since they wished to retain their base on their farms, which provided a subsistence income that was 'topped up' by a daily wage. Instead of being forced to go on operations into 'foreign' parts their narrow aim was to protect their families and communities as need arose. While Boualam did have wider political ambitions, becoming elected to the National Assembly, he, like Si Cherif, strongly supported French suzerainty and continued to fly the tricolour, unlike Kobus and Bellounis who displayed the green and white flag of an independent Algeria.

The expansionist-political movements of Kobus and Bellounis operated in quite a different way. In October 1956, as the MNA in the Chelif region disintegrated under the combined offensive of French and FLN forces, Djillali Belhadj began to recruit or draw in the remnants of the Messalist fractions into his guerrilla band located in his home base in the Attafs east of Oued Fodda. With the backing of the DST and Captain Conill, the SAS officer of Lamartine, he increased his force from forty in October to about two hundred in the spring of 1957.[58] The government decision in January to launch *Pilote* 1 immediately raised the question of the role of 'Force K' in the wider operation.[59] On 23 March the DST handed authority over the Kobus force to General de Brebisson, commander of the ZOA, who controlled the maquis through a liaison officer, Lieutenant Heux.

A note from the HQ of Goussault's Psychological Bureau in Algiers warned as early as April 1957 against the decision to support Kobus. Three options, it claimed, were available to the army: to leave the poisoned chalice with the DST, to force the band to become a regular *harka*, or to disband it.[60] But de Brebisson,

[56] J. Valette, 'Un contre-maquis', 15. [57] J. Valette, 'Un contre-maquis', 33.

[58] Claude Paillat, *Dossier secret de l'Algérie* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1962), 2.463–4.

[59] AOM 9140/78, note prefect of Orleansville, 17 January 1957, the role of Kobus was to be 'clarified' before start of operations.

[60] SDH 1H2536/2*, *fiche Bureau psychologique*, Algiers, 27 April 1957. The author of the note, probably Goussault, may have been well aware of the fact that the DST had a bad record of initiating 'third force' actions, as it had with the catastrophic *Oiseau bleu*, which it fobbed off onto the military when the project ran into difficulties.

the report concluded, had fallen back on the worst compromise by granting Kobus absolute control over a demarcated 'hunting terrain' from which regular army units were excluded:

> This compromise represents an extremely serious mistake on the psychological level. Nobody can fail to see our collusion with Kobus. But we have given up all the means to control the actions of this person. But we know that he remorselessly plunders and holds to ransom the French *colons* and that his activities are directed more to the 'recuperation' of the financial resources that he needs than to any other task.

The FLN would exploit this situation and the *Pilote* experiment would be damaged since, noted the report, the populations bordering the Kobus zone that they were seeking to win over 'have placed themselves under our protection or are about to do so, so that the trust that we place in Kobus is in fact in contradiction with the policy that we are pursuing'. Lacoste and Salan seem to have turned a deaf ear to such criticism from those who were close to the action, since they were bent on pursuing a wider third force strategy as revealed by the fact that during this period from April to June 1957 they were negotiating an identical arrangement with the MNA maquis of 'General' Bellounis.[61]

It is at this point that the Algiers government made a fatal error by entering into a pact with MNA-Messalist forces that entertained quite different ideas from the French about the nature of the agreement. For Algiers the objective of the third force strategy was to be restricted to military operations: the French would supply the MNA maquis with weapons, vehicles, and other materials so that they could act as an effective fighting force against the FLN, and relieve the pressure on conventional units, at lower economic and human (i.e. French-ethnic) cost. According to various negotiated agreements, Force K and the Bellounis ANPA (*Armée nationale du peuple algérien*) were to operate only inside precisely defined boundaries outside of which they had to be accompanied by French units, usually from the 11th choc, and were not allowed to impose taxation, forced recruitment, secret tribunals, and other forms of OPA on populations that were under the civil administration of the prefecture and SAS.[62]

The colonial government did nurture the propaganda myth that the guerrillas constituted a genuine 'third force' expression of the will of the Algerian people, so that they could be presented in the UN and elsewhere as a viable negotiator, a political movement that, in any final negotiations to end the war, could be invited

[61] P. Gaillard, *L'alliance*, 61, General Salan approved opening negotiations with Bellounis on 4 May, and the senior administrator, the General Inspector Georges Ciosi, supervised both the Kobus and Bellounis operations that were identical in their French planning.

[62] See P. Gaillard, *L'alliance*, 211–31, app., the various texts of Salan, Lacoste, and Bellounis.

to the table as a counter to FLN claims to be the sole representative of the nation. The French, however, were taken by surprise when both Kobus and Bellounis took this role seriously, and as inheritors of the Messalist tradition, refused to act as puppets of the French, but proclaimed their autonomy as an 'anti-colonial' movement that would work jointly with the French to liberate Algeria from the FLN that was seen as an evil tool of international communism. The Kobus-Bellounis maquis, refusing to stay within the narrowly defined straight-jacket of military operations and a restricted zone, declared themselves to be leaders of national political movements, and their ambition was to expand their neo-Messalist network throughout Algeria.[63] Kobus, who had a long experience as a PPA/OS leader in Algiers, far from being confined to the narrow zone of the Attafs, retained a political network that reached to Algiers and Paris, which he visited frequently.[64]

Kobus, quite unlike the local defensive forces of the *bachaga* Boualam and Si Cherif, saw his own role as that of a national leader, even if his base in the Attafs seemed to be highly localized. This was reflected in the recruitment strategy of the 'Force K' that was less oriented towards the peasantry of the Ouarsenis than towards politicized, urban militants, many of them with a long history in the Messalist movement. While the Belhadj family, well-to-do farmers with a background in the *caidat*, had extensive lands and a core clientele base in the Attaf region, Kobus actively sought recruits for his guerrilla force in Blida, Algiers, and its suburbs of Cheragas.[65] The small 'warlord' bands in the Chelif that joined up with Kobus had fled mainly from the MNA underground in Orleansville and other towns. The Force K companies, which modelled themselves on the ALN *katibas*, tended to be units that were a composite of militants that originated from a wide range of geographical origins and urban backgrounds and, as such, they were more likely to escape the confines of narrow village or regional identities, and to be wedded to a political ideology of national unity.

The ambitions of Kobus, to expand geographically outwards into an ever-widening political movement, meant that Force K began to move beyond the boundaries of its prescribed zone, to the consternation of the French. By October 1957 there was a growing opposition from the inhabitants on the perimeter of the

[63] Both Kobus and Bellounis, while claiming to defer to Messali Hadj, living in exile in France, in reality had broken away from any control by the *Zaim*. P. Gaillard, *L'alliance*, 150, 157, 213, Bellounis rejected a French ultimatum of 6 September 1957, the 'restriction of my field of action, that was at the national scale, to a narrow geographical zone', and by early 1958 was seeking to extend his zone of action up to the Tunisian and Moroccan borders.

[64] On the Messalist network that continued to operate in Algiers and Paris throughout the war, see J. Valette, *Messalistes*, 188–98. Messali sent envoys to make contact with the Bellounis-Kobus maquis but, in practice, was unable to effect control over the forces that remained obscure and towards which he remained suspicious.

[65] J. Valette, 'Le Maquis Kobus', 72, has identified from a list of fifty-nine combatants that 70 per cent came from Algiers-Cheragas; J. Valette, *Messalistes*, 159–60, Bellounis recruitment network likewise extended to Algiers, Blida, and Boufarik.

Kobus zone to what they viewed as a predatory and invasive private army whose purpose was to terrorize and extract wealth. Against the wishes of the Algiers government, Kobus was seeking to replace both the FLN OPA and the official municipalities with his own administrative and judicial organization.

To the consternation of the police, the municipality, and SAS based in Duperré, Force K guerrillas, dressed in the distinctive clothing and caps of Bigeard's parachutists, from September 1957 onwards were aggressively investing the town, defying the local gendarmes and police, levying taxes from businessmen, terrorizing Algerian clients of European cafés, forcibly recruiting young men, hauling people before its own tribunals, and carrying out torture, beatings, and summary executions.[66] On about July 1957, for example, Larbi Kerrouche was taken by four 'Messalistes' from the Café des CFA run by Germaine Bensaid, a well-known centre of communist activism in the 1940s, and taken to the *caid*'s house in Bou Rached where he was hung from a beam by his arms and beaten, before passing in front of a tribunal, which fined him 10,000 francs for being a client in a European café. On 18 November he was again seized in the Bensaid café, but sought refuge at the police-station where he lodged a complaint, while refusing to identify his aggressors.[67] Young men were the particular attention of press-gangs, as in the case of Abdelkader Zidane, who was forcibly recruited and his Peugeot van 'requisitioned', in June 1957. On the eve of Kobus's assassination he had been able to escape the MNA by hiding in a wheat field, and made his way to the house of his father, Djillali Zidane, vice president of the *Délégation spéciale* at Oued Fodda.[68]

However, what set the danger bells ringing in Algiers, was not so much the violence of 'Force K' than the signs that Kobus was creating a parallel local government organization, much on the lines of the OPA of the FLN. Lieutenant Descamps, head of the SAS at Djelida, reported during November 1957 that the 'Force K' was expanding eastwards into the northern part of the *douar* Ouagenay where it was campaigning against the official *Délégations spéciale*, and forcing the population to attend meetings where an alternative, counter-municipality was created. The confused inhabitants were asking which of the two bodies was valid, 'that of K or that set up by orders of the SAS chief?'.[69] The Force K, commented Descamps to the sub-prefect, which was hostile to French authority, needed to

[66] AOM 1K/1215, reports of the Duperré police commissioner, 30 October and 19 November 1957. The inhabitants, he remarked, were demanding to know what their ultimate goal was, especially as 'they are to be seen operating under a green and white flag with a crescent and star', the flag of independence that was identical to that of the FLN. On the identical aggressive intrusion by the ANPA into the town of Djelfa, see P. Gaillard, *L'alliance*, 142–3.

[67] AOM 1K/1215, statement to the Duperré police, 18 November 1957.

[68] AOM 4i206, *renseignement généraux*, Orleansville, 3 May 1958, Djillali Zidane, a friend of Kobus's brother-in-law Ahmed Eziane, was assassinated on 1 May, probably a revenge killing because he was party to the FLN plot that led to Kobus's elimination on 28 April.

[69] AOM 4SAS54, SAS Djelida, 9 and 20 November 1957.

receive firm instructions that it was not 'installed in the northern [*douar*] Ouaguenay to play its own political games and to establish an official *Délégation* when the people have already freely chosen their representatives'.

The political activities of both the Bellounis and Kobus forces was increasingly a matter of concern for conservative *colons* interests in late 1957. On 28 October a meeting of the Duperré town council agreed to move into a special secret session, and discussed various actions of 'Force K' against councillors, among them the assault and 'disappearance' of Abdelkader Fredj, whose whereabouts remained unknown, and a threatening letter to another councillor, Marius Tordjman, demanding a million francs.[70] The councillors informed the prefect of Orleansville of their decision to resign collectively since 'it has become impossible to carry on the administration'. The powerful conservative *Fédération des maires* seized the opportunity to issue a communiqué, along with a copy of the minutes of the 'secret' Duperré meeting, in which it condemned official support for Bellounis and Kobus as a part of a dangerous strategy that was dividing French unity.[71]

In conclusion, what were the impacts of the *bachaga* Boualam and Kobus's 'third force' strategy during *Pilote* 1? The ambitious Colonel Goussault, against all the evidence from lower-level actors, provided a glowing account to the Algiers government and senior commanders of the success of the *Pilote* experiment, including the Boualam *harkis* and the Kobus force.[72] However, within five days another report of the 5th Bureau was giving a rather different picture and noted how Boualam's support for the French was wavering, while in the case of Kobus, 'his loyalty remains unsure and his personality is embarrassing enough for General Renaud to think that it may be necessary to get rid of him in the near future'.[73] It seems highly likely that the French would have eventually removed Kobus, just as they eventually tracked down and 'liquidated' Bellounis on 14 July 1958, but for the fact that the FLN got there first. The FLN secretly penetrated 'Force K', and engineered an internal coup that led to his assassination and decapitation on 28 April 1958.[74]

The global impact of the Boualam-Kobus strategy on the rural population was catastrophic and rendered the objectives of French 'pacification' largely futile. The peasantry in the Ouarsenis and along the piedmont of the Chelif valley were caught up in a chaotic and unstable civil war in which they faced the incessant ebb

[70] AOM 9140/5, extract from minutes of town council, 28 October 1957.

[71] AOM 9140/5, commissar of police, Ténès, 17 December 1957.

[72] SHD 1H2536/1, 5th Bureau, Orleansville, *bilan de l'experience 'Pilote'*, 12 July 1957, app. 12, 'A special mention must be made of the "Force K" that under the excellent control of the selected officer [Heux], is ever more engaged in an effective collaboration under our control. It now effects an efficient surveillance of the plain to the south of the Chelif [River]'.

[73] SHD 1H2536/1, this unsigned report, *Bureau psychologique*, 17 July 1957, is an account by Goussault of his tour of inspection across the ZOA on 15–17 July.

[74] Azzedine, *On nous appelait*, 386–92.

and flow of not two, but three opposed forces, the French army and *harkis*, the FLN, and the MNA. Peasants were caught in a complex and paralysing web of conflicting interests in which at one moment the ALN could descend and set up an OPA, demanding money and recruits, only to be threatened the next day by the MNA making identical demands and likewise laying claim to be the true liberators of the Algerian people. In turn French operations could sweep in and arrest or burn the houses of 'collaborators'.[75] Faced with such an inherently unstable position one response of peasants was to withdraw into a canny silence, what the French referred to as '*attentisme*', increasing the chances of survival by not providing any verbal or other public or overt indication of support for one side or another.[76]

The priority of mountain peasants was to secure enough food or income for the family and, at the same time, to protect it from marauding bands or violent military operations. Various strategies could be deployed to achieve the two goals. Since younger men were the main target during operations, they might attempt to flee into the surrounding forests, but increasing numbers in the Chelif region also sought a visa so that they could find relatively higher wages in the factories of metropolitan France, and hoped to evacuate their families from the war zone.[77] Most peasants, a highly conservative class, were loath to abandon their ancestral lands and would do anything to cling to their farms. For those who stayed put as the war-crisis deepened, one preference might be to join whatever side seemed to offer the best chances of protection and resources, be it the French, the MNA, or ALN. All three sought to recruit and retain its Algerian fighters by offering good conditions of pay and family allowances or pensions for wounded, imprisoned, or deceased combatants.[78] Many peasants in the Beni Boudouane joined the *harkis* since *bachaga* Boualam could offer relatively well-organized auto-defence units to defend their families, and daily wages that could supplement the income from the subsistence farm. Such families, contradictory as it may seem, were not necessarily opposed to Algerian independence, and many were willing to assist the FLN by passing on intelligence, weapons, and ammunition.

However, by 1957 in both the Dahra and Ouarsenis, many desperate peasant communities, faced with widespread violence, economic dislocation, and hunger

[75] See N. MacMaster, *Burning*, 230–4, for an analysis of an identical zone of chaos, in the area of 'Bellounist' and FLN conflict in the region of Aumale. The SAS officer at Bordj Okhriss described the confusion among peasants unable to identify contending groups.

[76] On such strategies, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); N. MacMaster, 'The "Silent Native"'.

[77] Monique Hervo, *Chroniques du Bidonville. Nanterre en guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), provides numerous accounts of women who were forced to flee the violence of mountain zones.

[78] AOM 1K/1215, *renseignements généraux*, Orleansville, 1 March 1958, noted those recruited by the MNA, 'in effect small peasants or simple labourers who, faced with the difficulty of feeding themselves and their families, risk being attracted by the benefits offered by "K"'.

were finally forced to seek an escape through forms of mass surrender to the French, the '*aman*', or to flee as refugees down from the hills into the military *regroupements* camps of the plain. Such mass evacuation, as we see in the final chapter, marked the definitive failure of the *Pilote* project to 'pacify' mountain society through a hearts and mind strategy.

20

The *regroupements* Camps and the Collapse of *Pilote* 1

By August 1957 the *Pilote* 1 operation was being wound down and, at the same time, declaimed as a successful model of counterinsurgency, was rapidly expanded to the rest of Algeria. However, as we have seen, the key goal of the Servier experiment, which was to effect a 'pacification' of the mountainous zones in which the ALN guerrilla was embedded and found a peasant support base, had significantly failed. The army propaganda machine was able to supply the media with convincing pictures of medical teams and EMSI nurses at work in the *bled*, but the photo-journalist field reports were restricted to a small number of successful posts, the showcase locations of Bou Maad and Breira. The problem facing the military, as the prefect Chevrier was happy to point out in his monthly reports to Lacoste, was that the army lacked the troops, materials, and finances to be able to consolidate its hold after large '*ratissage*' operations, and to install across vast spaces of isolated, and craggy terrain the infrastructures that could sustain development and, at the same time, protect it from ALN counter-attacks. It was against this background that senior commanders, who remained agnostic about the new-fangled theories of revolutionary warfare and psychological action, grew impatient with the inherently slow processes of social and economic reform, quickly resorted to the traditional 'big division' methods of mechanical warfare, including mass sweep 'search and destroy' operations, bombing, and artillery fire.

There existed an obvious contradiction at the core of the SAS and 5th Bureau project, the belief that it was possible to carry out repressive military 'shock' tactics while simultaneously protecting the civilian population. The advocates of a hearts and minds strategy looked on with anger and frustration as months of careful work to win over a particular fraction through medical assistance, education, and agrarian reform could be destroyed in a matter of hours by the incursion of troops that rounded up hundreds of men, destroyed food reserves, and burned down houses. *Pilote* 1 operations had barely begun when Feaugas reported, with apparent approval, how 'the bludgeoning by plane of the *douars* known to shelter the rebels has inspired among the inhabitants a healthy fear of the French Forces'.[1] The military archives make passing reference to bombing as a standard practice

[1] SHD 1H2536/1, Feaugas to Colonel Goussault, 10 March 1957.

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
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that was barely worth comment.[2] However, an unsigned caustic report, almost certainly by Servier, observed that the military commanders had evidently failed to understand the meaning of revolutionary warfare since they remained wedded to the idea of 'a pure and simple brutal repression, that's to say in most instances, blind, collective, and unintelligent'.[3]

The military in the Chelif region, as elsewhere in Algeria, turned increasingly to the strategy of the free-fire forbidden zone (*zone interdite*), which instead of trying to win over peasant communities in the mountain so as to isolate the guerrillas would achieve the same goal immediately and in a more radical way, by the evacuation of the entire population into the French-controlled plain. Across Algeria by 1961 resettlement (*regroupement*) had displaced 2,350,000 people into camps, while another 1,175,000 had fled into urban shanty towns.[4] In all half of rural inhabitants had moved, although the impacts were far greater in the mountains where the ALN had been particularly active, as in the Dahra and Ouarsenis where 70 per cent and 77 per cent respectively of the peasantry ended up in camps.[5] The forced *regroupement* entailed a massive dislocation of traditional peasant society, and was to have enormous, enduring impacts on post-Independence Algerian society.[6] The purpose of this final chapter is to examine how such processes of resettlement developed in the ZOA, a main region of fieldwork by Michel Rocard (1958), Bourdieu and Sayad, and Cornaton, during *Opération Pilote* and after.

A strategy of peasant 'evacuation' was adopted from the very start of the Algerian War in the Aurès mountains, and a system of *regroupements* camps

[2] AOM 9140/175, *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 7 January 1958, notes, for example, the current use of bombing in the Ouarsenis that had led to 'a lowering of morale in the population and led to a rallying and demand for protection in the *douars* Zakkor and Beni Bou Khannous'. Jérôme Monod, later to become a top civil servant and industrialist, in his *Le déchirememt: lettres d'Algérie et du Maroc, 1953–1958* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 98–120, gives a chilling eyewitness account of military operations in the area of Bou Caid during February to April 1957 during which the mountain population was subjected to bombing, artillery, and strafing. An injured girl of 6 or 7 that he tried to evacuate in a jeep died in his arms.

[3] SHD 1H2536/1, *note sur l'emploi des musulmanes dans l'armée*, 3 September 1957. This unsigned report was almost certainy written by Servier.

[4] M. Cornaton, *Les regroupements*, 122–3.

[5] See the maps of *regroupements* (December 1960), M. Cornaton, *Regroupements*, 125; and for 1960 in M. Feraoun, *Journal*, 8–9. Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, Le *déracinement, la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964), 201, in the department of Orleansville by 9 August 1960, 239,520 individuals had been regrouped into 291 camps.

[6] On the historiography of the *regroupements*, see Fabien Sacriste, 'La "Méthode Mao" contre les "Milles villages"? Réfléxions sur l'historiographie des "regroupements"', in A. Kadri et al. (eds), *La guerre d'Algérie* (2015), 179–85; key studies, in addition to Cornaton, are P. Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le déracinement*; Michel Rocard, *Rapport sur les camps de regroupement et autres textes sur la guerre d'Algérie*, edited by Vincent Duclert et al. (Paris: Fayard, 2003); Charles-Robert Ageron, 'Une dimension de la guerre d'Algérie: les "regroupements" de populations', in J.-C. Jauffret and M. Vaisse (eds.), *Militaires*, 327–62; Fabien Sacriste, 'Les camps de "regroupements": une histoire de l'état colonial et de la société rurale pendant la guerre d'indépendance algérienne (1954–1962)', thesis, University of Toulouse 2014.

was generalized by General Parlange during 1956.[7] Such methods developed in the Chelif region during 1957 and may have spread from the Constantinois, although such techniques would have been well known to commanders in the ZOA, in particular from Indochina.[8] *Regroupements* in the Dahra and Ouarsenis emerged in an ad hoc way during 1957 as a method of evacuating population from an ALN zone of dispersed population in what was initially regarded as a temporary solution and which did not, it was assumed, require careful advance planning of permanent housing and facilities.

One of the ironies of the Servier-Goussault master plan for *Pilote* 1 was that the Chelif region was chosen for the COIN experiment precisely because dispersed population was regarded as providing the French military with a key advantage over the ALN, whereas the opposite proved to be the case. From the very start of *Pilote* 1 the OI, Captain Guyomar, reported on the difficulty of making contact with the population to organize propaganda meetings because of the pattern of dispersed settlement.[9] A 5th Bureau report from Teniet el Haad likewise noted the difficulty of contact where population was dispersed throughout a difficult terrain, 'This is the reason why we have tried to achieve the *regroupement* of the population around the army posts but, for the moment, this *regroupement* is impossible because of the lack of tents that are nowhere to be found and without which we cannot accommodate the families while they build their houses at the chosen location'.[10]

The decree of 17 March 1956, under the special powers act, by providing legal cover for the creation of *zones interdites* (ZI), opened the flood gates to the forced expulsion of the inhabitants of the mountainous interior.[11] Between January and July 1957 General de Brebisson requested from the prefect of Orleans the legal declaration (*arrêtes*) of numerous *zones interdites* in the department. In most instances the proposal originated with the commanders of the sub-sector who submitted to de Brebisson plans that demarcated the boundaries of the new zones.[12] Lieutenant-Colonel Le Cointe of the sub-sector Nord, for example, asked for a zone in an area of dense forest in the *douar* Sidi Simiane, a 'known

[7] Fabien Sacriste, 'Génèse et développement d'une politique de regroupements. Le cas de la région de Constantine (1954–1962)', *Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP)* 3.1 (2012), 5–26.

[8] M. Cornaton, *Regroupements*, 36–8, on Indochina as a model for Algerian resettlement.

[9] SHD 1H2409, report of Guyomar, 19 March 1957.

[10] SHD 1H2536/1, report Teniet el Haad, 7 July 1957. The strategy of forced resettlement in militarized camps developed historically in colonial wars as a standard response to the difficulties of controlling scattered or nomadic populations, see M. Cornaton, *Regroupements*, 37, on Cambodia *c.*1951–2; F. Sacriste, 'Genèse', 8, on the Aurès. AOM 9140/47, *Bureau d'aménagement rural*, Orleansville, '*Les Regroupements*', *c.* September 1961, notes, 'The policy of *regroupement* has been developed with the aim of controlling and organizing populations that were previously dispersed'.

[11] Sylvie Thénault, 'Rappels historiques sur les camps de regroupement de la guerre d'Algérie', in M. Rocard, *Rapport*, 231, 285–92.

[12] AOM 9140/69, has an extensive file on the creation of ZI in the department of Orleansville, through orders (*arrête*) dated 7 January, 25 March, 24 May, 25 June, and 1 July; see also SHD 1H2536/1, Chef d'escadrons Delapierre SAS sub-prefecture of Miliana to Goussault, 23 February 1957.

refuge and convenient sanctuary for the rebel bands', that even considerable infantry actions had been unable to secure. A date was set in each prefectoral order by which any persons, in particular in groups of more than five, could be subject to artillery and aerial attack, and sometimes specified markets that were to be closed, while other economic locations, such as the mine at Breira, were excluded from the measure in a radius of 1 kilometre.

In most instances the prefect Chevrier, who regularly discussed such issues with the military in the *État-major mixte*, acquiesced, but a significant disagreement arose in one instance that reveals the growing tensions between the military and civil authorities over the consequences of *regroupements*.[13] On 9 February de Brebisson informed Chevrier that following a joint meeting with the commander of the neighbouring department of Médéa, they had agreed on plans to impose a ZI on certain border *douars* that were 'totally dominated by the HHL [*hors-les-lois*] and difficult of access'. De Brebisson even admitted that there was no possibility of the army being able to control this area and to lay the basis for the implantation of permanent posts to stabilize the peasantry.[14] The sub-prefect of Miliana objected strongly to the proposal. In particular two of the *douars* to be included, Oued Sebt and Djebel Louh, had a dense population of 2,450 inhabitants, but no plans had been made for their rehousing and provisioning, nor how this was to be financed.[15] It would be almost impossible, he claimed, to stop the peasants from continuing to tend crops planted in small clearings scattered through the forest. He added that de Brebisson's plan seemed to fly in the face of a military strategy for the area that had been carefully researched and put in place on 7 November 1956.[16] When de Brebisson brought his proposal for the new ZI to a meeting of the *État-major mixte* on 2 March Chevrier fully backed the position of the sub-prefect, and as chair he vetoed the creation of the new ZI until adequate financial and military means could be found, and a detailed plan of the *regroupements* camps had been drawn up. At the same time, the prefect hinted that these issues, already under study by the Miliana civil administration, would be rapidly resolved.[17]

One of the most extraordinary contradictions in the 'pacification' programme in the Chelif region was the fact that General de Brebisson was actively pushing ahead the creation of numerous *zones interdites* in the ZOA during January to July, at the precise moment that he had agreed to oversee the *Pilote* operation.

[13] On this issue, see Keith Sutton, 'Army Administration Tensions over Algeria's Centre de Regroupement, 1954–1962', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26.2 (1993), 243–70.

[14] AOM 9140/69, de Brebisson to Chevrier, 9 February 1957.

[15] AOM 9140/69, sub-prefect of Miliana to Chevrier, 19 February 1957.

[16] Behind the opposition we can detect the hand of SAS Chef d'escadrons Delapierre, an adviser attached to the sub-prefecture of Miliana, one of the best-informed intelligence officers in the region; see SDH 1H2536/1, 28 February 1957, on his opposition to the *zones interdites* that would create problems of rehousing a large population, a question that he had already raised without effect.

[17] AOM 9140/175, minutes of *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 2 March 1957.

The sector colonels and de Brebisson, in their applications to Chevrier for new ZIs, made it clear that the primary objective was to commence immediately long-range artillery fire and aerial bombardment and strafing. As Lieutenant-Colonel Lecointe casually stated in his original application to de Brebisson, once a prefectoral order had been issued the *douar* Sidi Simiane, 'could be attacked by the airforce without any particular precautions'. De Brebisson, in his application for a ZI in the Zaccar region just to the north and west of Miliana, included maps of the proposed area to be subject to 'harassing artillery fire', as well as aviation.[18] Most surprising of all is the short time gap, usually just under a week, between the date of a prefectoral order and that of its application.[19] It seems likely that this was to prevent the ALN getting sufficient advance notice to remove its forces, but the main victims were the thousands of peasants who failed to get notification, and were subsequently killed by sporadic bombardment, artillery fire, and strafing.

Jean Servier, along with some SAS officers and other advocates of a 'hearts and mind' strategy were outraged by the indiscriminate violence of the military. *Regroupements* in the Chelif derived from military, strategic considerations that by prioritizing the battle against the FLN, undermined the key reforming and welfare logic of *Pilote* 1.

This became clear during a high-level meeting in Algiers in May 1957, when major differences emerged between Pierre Bolotte, director of the cabinet of the Algiers IGAME, and General Allard. Bolotte maintained the position of the *Pilote* 1 model, that if the rural population was regrouped it should be in what he called, 'temporary army villages', in the mountains where peasants could live in traditional *gourbis* near their fields, as they had during operations in Cambodia and South Vietnam. 'It would be preferable not to brutally transform the way of life of refugee populations.' If the peasants were removed from the hills, they would have no farming income, and the financial costs would be astronomic, while the rebels would be given free rein to control the mountains. Allard, and the other generals present, disagreed: the population should be cleared out to create 'dead zones' in which the FLN would be deprived 'of the economic and human support so necessary to the life of the armed bands'. But while the generals insisted on removing the population from the mountains, they demanded at the same time that the civil authorities bear the costs of creating the new *regroupements* camps. By late 1957 the army had clearly won the day, and the consequences for rural society were catastrophic.

There exists particularly detailed information on the conditions faced by peasants forced to flee from the *douar* of Bethaia, deep in the interior of the Ouarsenis, due to the research of Jacques Bugnicourt, a SAS officer and a member

[18] AOM 9140/69, de Brebisson to Chevrier, 23 February 1957.

[19] AOM 9140/69, a new ZI imposed on the *douar* Dahra by order dated 7 January came into force on 10 January.

of the Agricultural Reform Commission in the cabinet of the prefect of Orleansville, General Gracieux. When Michel Rocard, the socialist militant and future prime minister, arrived in the port of Algiers in September 1958, Bugnicourt was waiting on the quayside to reveal to his friend the existence of the camps in which tens of thousands of Algerians were facing starvation conditions. The two decided to carry out a clandestine investigation, over a period of three months, of camps in the Chelif, Blida, and Tiaret area, and wrote a detailed exposure that caused a sensation when leaked to the press on 16–17 April 1959.[20]

In the summer of 1957 the French army launched a series of major operations against the ALN guerrillas in the mountains south of the Oued Fodda dam and the prefect reported the flight of some three to four thousand refugees from the *douars* of Beni Bou Attab, Chouchaoua, and Bethaia down to the region of Lamartine where the SAS officer housed some of them, nearly three hundred men, women, and children, in the requisitioned Michel farm.[21] Two years later 293 peasants of Bethaia were still living in the 'provisional' farm accommodation and Bugnicourt described a harrowing picture of the emaciated, ragged families that inhabited a barn subdivided into cells by branches. Forced to abandon most of their livestock in the mountains, these semi-pastoral people, who were used to a balanced diet that included milk and meat, were reduced to living almost entirely on carbohydrates. The health consequences were catastrophic, infant mortality was over 50 per cent, and some adults had incurable TB and had been abandoned by the French doctors.[22]

Interviews with former refugees by Mohamed Rebah, mainly women and children expelled from the *douar* of Bouhlal in the eastern Dahra in August 1958 and who were moved down by army lorry to the camp of Messelmoune on the coast, gives a sense of the confusion and fear of the peasants as they were brutally ejected from the small, familiar world of the village, to which many of them would never return. Fatma Hammiche, aged 18 at the time, recounts:

> The soldiers arrived one morning in the month of August. It was 1958. They forced us to leave the house. '*Allez fissa*' (move, quick), they shouted. They did not give me the time to take anything. My husband was in the forest. He saved himself with his brother Ramdane, when the lookouts warned that soldiers were coming. The soldiers led me and the children into a clearing, then set fire to the house. . . . I walked on the path from Immalayou to Hayouna, carrying my

[20] The full report is in M. Rocard, *Rapport*, 103–53.

[21] AOM 12CAB107, report prefect Orleansville, 5 October 1957; 12CAB54, prefect January 1958.

[22] Jacques Bugnicourt, *Les regroupés de la Ferme Michel (Arrondissment d'Orléansville)*, *Commission départementale de la réforme agraire*, October 1959, *Bibliothèque de recherches africains*, Rue Malher, Paris, AB BrAL35; in a second report, *Quelques obstacles au developpement rural dans le Departement d'Orleansville*, 17 July 1959, AB Br AL 36, Bugnicourt excoriates the failure to develop coherent urban planning for the *regroupement* camps, 'they were built no matter where, no matter how, with no matter what'.

daughter, who had been burned [by napalm?] during a bombardment, on my back. At Hayouna the soldiers loaded us into lorries. . . . The journey was tough. As we approached the coast, at sight of the immense sea, I was afraid. I had the feeling that they were going to throw us into the sea, which I had never seen so close'.[23]

Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, in their classic study of 1964, *Le déracinement*, analysed the violent mass displacement of population, 'among the most brutal known to history', as one that radically dislocated the traditional integrated social, economic, and cultural universe of the peasantry. Some of the top civil servants and army commanders were aware of the damaging impacts on the psychological condition and mental health of the peasantry. In a meeting in August 1957 the prefect, Chevrier, remarked that it was necessary not only to find the material means to sustain such massive numbers, but 'to take account of the psychology of the population and their habit of living dispersed'.[24] But while the refugee population was, beyond doubt, the victim of violent military incursion over which they had little, if any, control, there were some situations in which the peasants were able to seize the initiative and to collectively seek ways to protect their communities.

The French authorities used a range of terms to describe different kinds of settlement policy, and in the next section I turn to the question of mass *ralliements* that has received less attention from historians, but which played a key role in the early months of *Pilote* 1. *Ralliements* can be defined as the process by which entire collectivities, often a fraction of up to a thousand people or more, presented themselves to the French authorities in a ritual act of surrender called the *aman*, but in most cases continued to inhabit their farmhouses.[25] The *aman*, a ritual tribal surrender involving sacrifice of a bullock, had become defunct in twentieth-century Algeria but was dramatically revived as an invented tradition after the suppression of the bloody Sétif revolt of May–June 1945. Between 12 and 24 May the military organized a sequence of elaborate submissions on the beaches near Kerrata where tens of thousands of cowed women, children, and old men were forced, on their knees, to beg pardon and to shout slogans, '*Vive la France!*' and '*Nous sommes des chiens!*'.[26]

[23] Kamel Kateb, Nacer Melhani, and M'Hamed Rebah, *Les déracinés de Cherchell. Camps de regroupement dans la guerre d'Algérie (1954–1962)* (Paris: INED, 2018), 73.

[24] AOM 9140/175, minutes *État-major mixte*, Orleansville, 3 August 1957.

[25] *Ralliements* also referred to individual acts of surrender, usually by FLN militants that joined the French side, but with which I am not concerned here.

[26] Boucif Mekhaled, *Chroniques d'un massacre, 8 mai 1945. Sétif, Guelma, Kherrata* (Paris: Syros/Au Nom de la Mémoire, 1995), 189–91; J.-L. Planche, *Sétif*, 225–7. On identical acts of mass submission (*sottomissione*) carried out by occupying Italian forces in Libya, see Eileen Rynan, *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 81–4.

Such highly mediatized ceremonies, the epitome of neo-tribal patrimonialism, were revived on a large scale during the Algerian war, and assumed a particularly dramatic form in the Ouarsenis, south-west of Orleansville, between February and March 1957, coinciding with the early planning stage of *Pilote* 1. The surrender of the *douar* Adjama, led by its *caid* on 22 January, triggered a cascade of similar demands by another eight, adjacent *douars* on 22 and 27 February, and 1, 3, and 7 March. Each '*aman*' ritual was carefully orchestrated by psychological warfare officers, in the presence of dignitaries like the prefect of Orleansville and General de Brebisson, and press photographers.

On 27 February, for example, all the adult males of the *douar* Beni Ouazane gathered in the small town of Massena, where the notables and fraction heads, after making an oath on the Koran, signed a solumn *Actes de soumission et de fidélité à la France*. In this the fraction leaders swore to remain faithful French citizens and promised 'to lead the inhabitants of our villages and territories to have the same sentiments towards France, our Motherland, and we promise not to feed, house, or provide any kind of assistance to the rebels and strangers, the cause of all our suffering. We and our families will live in perfect fraternity with the French Europeans.'[27] All 1,343 men of the *douar* then followed their leaders in signing the act, although in most instances this involved placing an inked fingerprint.[28] As often on such occasions, the organizers sought to impress the crowds with a display of French power through low-flying fighter planes in so-called '*flights de souveraineté*'.[29]

The rapid expansion of the 'spontaneous' demands for submission, in what was termed a 'chain reaction', caused considerable excitement among administrators and commanders in the Chelif region. In a matter of a few weeks tens of thousands of peasants in the western Ouarsenis were seeking to come over to the French side, and Goussault, Feaugas, and the 5th Bureau saw it as so important as to divert into the area some of the resources that were being built up in preparation for *Pilote* 1, including CHPT propaganda units and a battalion.[30] However, the heads of the 5th Bureau were all too aware of the danger that the mass submission was part of an elaborate FLN deception. Five months after the catastrophic '*Oiseau bleu*' operation army commanders had not forgotten the harsh lessons of the giant '*fête de ralliement*' at Agouni-Gourhane on 17 September 1956 when five thousand Kabyles came over to the French side and received modern arms.[31]

[27] AOM 12CAB182.

[28] The archives has three agreements, one for the *douar* Beni Ouazane, and two for the fraction Dahouat of the *douar* Sly. In a total of sixty signatures and marks, fifty-one are finger-prints.

[29] SHD 1H2536/1, *Chef de bataillon* Delmar to the Oran Division, 2 March 1957.

[30] SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan 'Pilote'*, 1 July 1957, the *Pilote* 1 zone was extended to include the Massena region.

[31] C. Lacoste-Dujardin, *Opération*, 49–50.

Two weeks later the 'rallied' men of the Iflissen drew a company of the *Chasseurs alpins* into a deadly ambush.

Jean Servier, using his expertise as an ethnologist, provided a penetrating insight into the FLN manipulation of *aman* rituals. He was highly scathing about the psychological warfare officers, whom he dubbed '*entrepreneurs en ralliements*' that imagined that they were skilfully managing the population when, in reality, they were being outsmarted by the enemy.[32] Servier, a witness to the surrender of the dissident village of Ait Leham, was able to use his expert knowledge of Berber culture to expose the fact that the elders of the *djemâa* were quietly sabotaging the binding nature of the religious oath of fealty by subverting the correct procedures for the ritual sacrifice of a ram.[33]

On 10 March Feaugas sent a note to Goussault on an investigation he had carried out on the wave of surrender demands in the western Ouarsenis and concluded that there was no evidence of a sinister manipulation by the FLN or MNA. The population was now prepared to join the French side because of a phase of intense military operations that had eliminated the OPA cells, shown the superior might of the French by the bombardment of villages harbouring the ALN, and had demonstrated that there existed a firm commitment, 'the determination of France to remain in Algeria'.[34] Lacoste was, however, sufficiently worried that the mass rallies in the western Chelif might constitute some form of manipulation that he issued guidelines on the conditions under which any future demand for a *ralliement* would have to be approved by the higher authorities.[35] Submission was only to be accepted by a relatively senior figure, such as a SAS officer or the commander of a sub-quarter, and the community had to give concrete proof of good faith such as handing over weapons, providing good intelligence, and other 'guarantees'.[36]

The main concern of the authorities was that a false '*aman*' could help the ALN to carve out a form of safe-zone: as Lacoste noted in his guideline, the enemy 'had a good chance of surviving in a community that had come over, all the better protected by a deceptive tranquillity'.[37] Once a *douar* was categorized as 'pacified' and under French control, the army could withdraw from the area, while the ALN, which desisted from operations in the *douar* to confirm the illusion of successful eradication of the enemy, could find a quiet and secure base. The ALN could also

[32] J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 100–6. One veteran, proudly bearing his medals, boasted of making sure that he attended, 'all the *ralliements*', events that Servier dismissed as 'ridiculous masquerades'.

[33] J. Servier, *Adieu Djebels*, 87–93.

[34] SHD 1H2536/1, Feaugas to Goussault, 10 March 1957.

[35] SHD 1H2409, Lacoste, *directive particulière concernant les redditions et ralliements*, 15 March 1957.

[36] A problem here was that the FLN proved adept at acts of deception and giving 'guarantees'. During *Oiseau bleu* the FLN handed to the French army the corpses of ALN guerrillas, but these were in reality the bodies of assassinated opponents of the FLN.

[37] SHD 1H2409, Lacoste, *directive particulière concernant les redditions et ralliements*, 15 March 1957.

receive French weapons, medicines, and other materials that were distributed to the auto-defence units and the inhabitants as part of the reconstruction programme. Georges Buis, posted in October 1959 to command a regiment near Bougie, discovered:

> . . . that a certain valley at the foot of the Babors, famous as the 'Happy Valley' because no incidents troubled the everyday pastoral scene, was a fief of the rebellion. The local *harkas* were recruited on the spot. The valley was relatively wealthy. The *katibas* could rest and recuperate there without being a burden on the population. It was not in anyone's interest to disturb things. On every occasion the authorities, in full array, visited this model of 'pacification'. Thus, unknown to them, they were escorted into the heart of the rebellion.[38]

Although it is impossible to measure the scale on which the FLN was able to initiate such deceptive *ralliements* across Algeria, it was clearly sufficiently widespread to reflect a general strategy. It also confirms our hypothesis that mountain communities were not always the powerless and passive objects of brutal military cleansing operations and forced displacement, as has usually been depicted by historians, but that in some instances the *douar* or fraction attempted to seize the initiative by negotiating with the French. As we have seen, many peasant communities in the Dahra and Ouarsenis were by 1956–7 facing a deepening cycle of violence, economic disruption, and hunger. Many fractions, confronted by late 1956 with the real possibility of becoming classified as part of a *zone interdite* and being forced into camps, calculated that it would be better to pre-empt this real threat, or at least to relieve the pressure of incessant French raids and bombing, by negotiating a form of *ralliement* that would carry the advantage of enabling peasants to continue to live in their existing *gourbis* and to farm their lands which, no matter how poor an existence, was preferable to the plight of those forced into the refugee camps.

The specific crisis situation confronting each fraction varied in an extraordinarily complex, patchwork quilt, but each small community tended to seek a collective response to the difficulties it faced through the *djemâa* that traditionally mediated group relationships with outside authorities. This was the way in which peasants had always sought to defend themselves in the face of a severe external threat. During the mass '*aman*' ceremonials in the western Ouarsenis in February and March 1957 we can see from the formal acts of submission that the colonial authorities, although officially working towards a political reform that was

[38] Georges Buis, *Les fanfares perdus, entretiens avec Jean Lacouture* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 205. Ritual submission as a strategy of carving out a safe-zone for combatants appears to have been a standard practice among the tribes of the Maghreb; see, for example, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanussi of Cyrenica* (Oxfor: Oxford University Press, 1949), 163–5.

replacing the *caidat* system by new municipalities, were continuing to operate through the system of fraction heads and local 'notables', simply because there was no other mechanism through which to organize or coordinate populations that were scattered in tiny hamlets through a vast, mountainous terrain.[39]

As we have seen, the *regroupement* process was frequently carried out, especially in the *zones interdites*, through acts of military violence in which peasants were forced from their farmhouses which were immediately destroyed to prevent the ALN using them as shelters and, more to the point, to stop the population from returning. However, in some instances the *douar* or fraction might attempt to initiate discussions with the colonial authorities where they felt, whether due to ALN or French pressures, that their best chances of survival came with mass relocation to an army post or camp.

The SAS officer Guy Vincent recounts how he was discretely approached by Boualem, a notable and leader of the *douar* Tilmoult in the mountains of the Tlemçen region, who in a few words intimated that the inhabitants had reached a decision and wished a message to be passed to the authorities that they urgently wanted a protective army unit to be placed in the *douar* but, if that was not possible, to be evacuated en bloc to the plain.[40] Vincent faced some opposition or heel-dragging by the army command, but eventually the entire population of Tilmoult was removed, along with its possessions, in a convoy of thirty lorries that transported them 40 kilometres down to Margerit.

There are numerous instances of such a process of negotiated *regroupement*, but one of the best documented concerns the inhabitants of the *douar* Tiara which was located just to the east of our area, on the southern side of the Blida Atlas, east of Médéa. In early 1959 the SAS captain Roger Eoche-Duval received a contact letter from Yahia ben Yahia of the *douar* Tiara and a meeting was finally arranged, although with some difficulty because of the extreme danger involved, in the market at Boufarik.[41] Eoche-Duval, who had become the *délégué* or mayor of Tiara in August 1958, opened negotiations with the military-prefectoral authorities in Médéa, and on 10 April 1959 the entire population was finally transported from their dispersed farmhouses down to the plain and a tent encampment close to the RN18 highway. In all about a thousand peasants descended from the mountains, along with two thousand head of livestock, and under the orders of

[39] The detailed memoirs of SAS officers, who replaced the old CM administrations and were closest to the inhabitants of the *douars*, show that it was not possible for them to carry out their tasks of civil administration and intelligence gathering without the assistance of the fraction *kebirs*: see, for example, Guy Vincent, *Képi Bleu. Un SAS. Un autre aspect de la guerre d'Algérie* (Bièvres: Jeune Pied-Noir, 1988).

[40] G. Vincent, *Képi bleu*, 15–16.

[41] Monique Eoche-Duval, *Madame SAS, femme d'officier. Algérie 1957–1962* (Paris: F.-X. de Guibert, 2007), 17–23. Monique Eoche-Duval joined her husband, along with their three children, in the SAS post of El Maria in November 1957. She participated fully in the activities of the SAS from then until Independence. The *douar* sent four representatives to the first contact meeting, but Yahia appeared as the most influential leader who, 'exercised an undeniable moral authority over his fellow citizens'.

the SAS began the construction of the new village of Sidi Naamane. On 11 April the top brass from Médéa arrived for an opening ceremony, reported by a journalist from *La Dépêche d'Alger*, during which the tricolour was raised and Roger Eoch-Duval organized, with the assistance of the *djemâa*, the ritual sacrifice of a ram.[42]

In Sidi Naamane there was no mention in 1959 of the term '*aman*', no doubt because shortly after the surrender rituals in the western Chelif in 1957 Lacoste sent a note to the prefects to avoid the kind of publicity that surrounded the '*amans*' since they were inspired by 'a tradition that it would be best to update' and in future they were to be known as, '*demandes de protection*'.[43] However, Sidi Naamane indicates how this kind of ritual was still very much alive in 1959, as was a discourse that was unable to escape the contradictions inherent in an attempt to wed the super-modernity of 'New Algeria' to epic biblical scenes of 'tribal' people, hundreds of men, women, and children pouring down from the hills with mules, cattle, sheep, and goats. Roger Eoche-Duval, in speaking to the journalist, played on the binary-theme of peasants from an archaic 'tribal' world, dazzled by their injection into the machine-age of electricity, giant lorries, and aeroplanes: 'We are barely a few kilometres from the world of refrigerators, mains water, two hours from '*Alger la blanche*', the Hotel Aletti, the illuminated towns of the coast fringed by beaches where beautiful sun-tanned girls lie on the golden sands.' At the very moment that the tricolour had been raised over the new village, in 'hommage to our common fatherland', a transport plane had passed overhead, 'coming from the petrol fields of Hassi Messaoud, full of oil engineers keen for life's pleasures'.[44] The discourse was a reflection of the contradictions of colonial power in the *bled*, of officers like Eoche-Duval who were caught between the urge to bring political reform and French modernity, and the local reality of needing to work through, or 'negotiate' with, the patrimonial forms of authority that remained so potent in the extended, patriarchal family and the *djemâa*.

In the dominant discourse, the French remained the masters, the humane agents of civilization who were nobly introducing the archaic peasantry into the cité. But we need to be careful not to accept this message at face value and not to lose sight of the fact that peasants were not simply passive objects of French power. Fanny Colonna, in a critical essay on her ex-mentor Pierre Bourdieu, claims that the extreme, all-enveloping theory of domination found in *Le déracinement*, and throughout his oeuvre in general, tended to disempower peasants who were seen as fundamentally unable to reflect critically on their

[42] M. Eoche-Duval, *Madame SAS*, 103–19.

[43] AOM 12CAB107, Lacoste to prefects, 3 April 1957. SHD 1H2536/1, *bilan de l'Opération 'Pilote'*, *Bureau psychologique État-major*, 10 May 1957, suggested that surrender rituals had been carried out too fast, before proper investigation, and in a blaze of self-seeking publicity.

[44] M. Eoche-Duval, *Madame SAS*, 116.

own lives.[45] The process of disintegration of 'indigenous' society, in which the *regroupements* camps provided a prime example or field, was produced, for Bourdieu, by all-enveloping processes of colonial capitalism, economic change, and dispossession. But, noted Colonna, this way of describing and theorizing the consequences of social exclusion 'brought about by colonization left the peasants' own cultural resources entirely out of the picture'.[46] Bourdieu, it might be said, was simply not able to conceive the kind of colonial history that was later theorized by the 'subaltern studies' school.

For Bourdieu the forced uprooting and relocation of the Algerian peasantry provided the clearest evidence of the terminal destruction of rural society. But, even at this, the most violent point of dislocation, many peasant communities managed to engage in coherent strategies of resistance or, at the least, damage limitation. The political scientist Stathis Kalyvas, seeking an answer to the question as to why, during the Greek Civil War of the 1940s, some villages suffered from high levels of violence while close neighbouring communities seemed to avoid it, found in the latter instance that village leaders were able to maintain local solidarity in a situation of imminent danger and panic, to present a united face in negotiating with external communist or German forces, and to prevent internal tensions and informing from leading into a destructive cycle of denunciations and killings.[47] The situation in rural Algeria was similar, with the possible difference that the political organization of community solidarity survived in the mountain societies of the Maghreb in an even stronger socio-cultural form than in Greece.

The 'Thousand Villages': From Military Strategy to a Developmental Agenda

This final section moves beyond May–June 1958, the terminal point of the study, to show how *regroupement* policy underwent a significant change in the direction of a developmental programme that had been long in the making. French colonialism had since the 1840s sought to assimilate the Algerian population into nucleated village settlements that would enable 'primitive' nomads to be aggregated into the ideal type of the urban *commune* that made a civilized economic and political order possible. By the 1930s the French had succeeded in imposing sedentarization on almost all the tent-dwelling rural inhabitants of the Tell, but the agro-pastoralists had resisted 'villagization' by clinging to the pattern of dispersed farmhouse settlement that was intimately linked to the patriarchal

[45] Fanny Colonna, 'The Phantom of Dispossession: From *The Uprooting* to *The Weight of the World*', in Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein (eds), *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 63–93.

[46] F. Colonna, 'The Phantom of Dispossession', 68.

[47] S. N. Kalyvas, *The Logic*, 1–2, 293–5.

organization and culture of the extended family as a joint economic unit. Lucien Paye, as Director of Reforms from September 1945, produced a sophisticated post-war plan for the integrated economic and political modernization of rural Algeria, at the heart of which lay the creation of a web of municipal centres. However, the attempt to apply rational forms of technocratic planning (*aménagement*) to the vast, under-developed interior, had exposed the insuperable problem of bringing modern services, from schools and medical centres to roads, piped water, and electricity, to such a widely scattered population. The 1946 *Plan d'action communale* (PAC) had just begun to investigate a five-year plan for the global movement of the peasantry into new villages when the ambitious restructuring process was brought to a halt with the removal of the liberal governor Chataigneau in early 1948.

Lucien Paye, invited back by Lacoste as Director of Political Affairs in June 1956, took up where he had left off in 1948, but now the ongoing war meant that the context in which a communal reform was to be carried out was entirely different. It was ironic that Goussault had deliberately selected the Chelif region, a zone of classic dispersed settlement, for the *Pilote* 1 operation on the grounds that this placed the ALN guerrilla forces at a disadvantage. But army commanders quickly found out that scattered populations made it almost impossible to 'pacify' the mountainous interior, and resorted increasingly from 1956 to the forced evacuation of the peasantry into *regroupements* camps. Many specialist planners of rural infrastructures, among them Jacques Bugnicourt, attacked the chaotic and unplanned dumping of tens of thousands of refugees into squalid 'temporary' camps, but their criticism assumed less the form of a blanket opposition than detailed proposals as to how the government could use expert planning principles to create modern settlements that were soon to be dubbed the 'thousand villages'.

The violent, military *regroupement* of the peasantry may have been condemned as an inhumane and shocking assault on the peasantry, but in a perverse way this had brought about the relocation and centralization of population that French planners had dreamed of since the *Bureaux arabes*. In other words, this was an opportunity not to be missed. In August 1958 Roger Martin, a general inspector of the administration sent to investigate the finances of *regroupement*, wrote that the politics of the camps needed to be viewed from a quite different angle: 'since rehousing is not only a politico-military technique but even more an exceptional, and perhaps unique, opportunity to remove a population from its traditional milieu and to transplant it into a different universe', enabling a social and political transformation and the construction of an 'Algerie nouvelle'.[48] James Scott, in his comparative study of villagization, notes that such vast programmes of social engineering involving the uprooting of millions of people could only be

[48] AOM 13CAB56, report August 1958, quoted by F. Sacriste, 'Genèse', 19–20.

implemented through violence and coercion under conditions of war, revolution, or authoritarian government.[49]

Jacques Bugnicourt played a key role, along with Michel Rocard, in exposing the appalling tragedy of the camps, but at the same time, as a specialist in rural planning, he was well informed on the global theory and practice of rural modernization and how development depended on the centralization of populations into villages. In 1960 he published, *Les nouveaux centres ruraux en Algérie*, a pioneering comparative study of rural development in Morocco, China, Israel, Mexico, the USSR, and elsewhere, and which also drew on his experience on the *Commission de réforme agraire* in the department of Orleansville.[50] In a section entitled 'Dispersal or grouping?', he argued that dispersed settlement was well adapted to an autarchic, subsistence farming system based on polyculture and where there was little market exchange, but the costs of bringing public utilities to them was prohibitive. Bugnicourt estimated, for example, that the provision of public utilities (roads, electricity, and water) was over four times more costly for a population divided into scattered hamlets than for a single village of seven hundred people.[51] The small, consanguine *bocca* group with its ancient patriarchal structures might be cohesive, but from the perspective of a developmental politics, claimed Bugnicourt, the objective was less to 'preserve the existing social life than to create a new, community spirit open to progress, eager to learn'.[52]

The End of the Peasantry?

The highly influential study by Bourdieu and Sayad, *Le déracinement* developed the thesis, which has been widely accepted by historians, that Algerian rural society was destroyed in two phases, first by the long-term impacts of colonization from 1830 onwards, most notably through the appropriation of the land, and second, within the space of seven years, by the dramatic disruption of the *regroupement*. I have argued throughout this study, in terms of the *long durée* from 1830 to 1954, that the traditional extended-family and local clan organizations of the peasantry remained remarkably resilient in the face of adversity. In this final part I turn to question Bourdieu's thesis that the *regroupements* camps marked the irreparable and irreversible dislocation of the complex, integrated structures of peasant society.

The Chelif region provides a particularly well-documented terrain in which to examine the long-term impacts of *regroupement* since Bourdieu's ARDES

[49] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, pt 3: 'The Social Engineering of Rural Settlement and Production', 182–261, looks at Soviet collectivization and villagization in Tanzania.

[50] Jacques Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres.*

[51] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 124–6.

[52] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 123.

research team carried out important fieldwork there during 1960 on the camps of Djebabra and Matmata, while Bugnicourt, as a member of the departmental *Commission de réforme agraire*, was well placed to visit and study numerous centres.[53] Bourdieu was familiar with the mid-Chelif since he was first posted there in 1955 during his thirty months of military service to guard an explosives depot near Oued Fodda, before he managed through family connections to Colonel Ducouneau to gain his transfer to the documentation centre in the General Government.[54] In Algiers Bourdieu, through omnivorous reading and contact with a circle of leading historians, among them André Nouschi, established a new sociological perspective on the colony with astonishing speed and authority, which quickly resulted in the publication of *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (1958).[55] On his demobilization in late 1957 Bourdieu began to teach sociology in the University of Algiers and undertook several research projects, including the investigation of the *regroupements* camps.

Official data indicated that by 9 August 1960 there were 291 camps or centres in the department of Orleansville, holding 239,520 individuals, of which 70 per cent were still 'provisional'.[56] To investigate the long-term impacts of this massive restructuring of rural society is difficult, in part because there existed an enormous range of camps, from hastily constructed 'micro-*bidonvilles*' of under a hundred *gourbis* thrown up around the defensive perimeter of isolated army posts, to huge 'new villages' planned in a grid of streets, complete with medical centres, schools, town halls, cafés, and shops. Extrapolating from the research of Bourdieu, Bugnicourt, and Cornaton, we can identify two types of empirical data that can be used as a measure of dislocation of the peasant economy and social organization. First is the evidence, extensively used by Bourdieu, of the spatial distribution of extended family and fraction groups internal to each camp, and the degree to which they had been literally broken up into fragments.[57] Second, was the extent to which peasants were able to walk out daily from the camp to continue to work their fields or to pasture livestock in forests and wastelands. Where this existed, and it was widespread, peasants were able to maintain their customary work

[53] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, contains a far more extensive coverage of individual camps, including maps, among them Oued Goussine, Ain Tidda, Yarmoul Medjadja, Herenfa, Pont d'Harchoun, Messelmoun, Charon, La Smala, Ain Sultan, and elsewhere. This enables us to compare Bourdieu's findings with a second body of evidence. On the dangerous and difficult conditions under which Bourdieu and his research assistants travelled to the camps see Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 46–57.

[54] Bourdieu remained unusually silent on this period, his first contact with Algerian rural society.

[55] Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (Paris: PUF, 1958); on Bourdieu's period in the central government, see André Nouschi, 'Autour de sociologie de l'Algérie', in *AWAL* 27–8 (2003), 29–35. Perhaps Bourdieu's reticence on the period from 1955 to 1957 stems from the fact that, although he was to later emphasize his anti-war position, he was taking part in the Central Committee on Psychological Action alongside Lucien Paye, Colonel Bruge, Goussault, Ducourneau, and others; see AOM 5Q/146, minutes of the Committee, 18 September 1956, and AOM 12CAB107, minutes, 18 March 1957.

[56] P. Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le déracinement*, 201–2.

[57] P. Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le déracinement*, 126.

traditions through the bleak refugee years of 1957 to 1962, and to more easily return after independence to rebuild their farmhouses and to pick up their life where they had left off.

The Spatial Dislocation of Family and Fraction

Of the two camps that the Bourdieu team studied in most detail, Djebabra and Matmata, the latter was created from scratch in June 1958 when the Djebel Louh, a zone of ALN guerrilla activity, was declared a *zone interdite*. By 1960 the camp, located in the Ouarsenis 25 kilometres south of Affreville in the floodplain of the Oued Derdeur, held 2,347 individuals housed in traditional, thatched *gourbis*.[58] Matmata brought together peasants from three *douars*, the Beni Fathem, Tighzert, and Djebel Louh, but what is most striking about the spatial location of these different populations internal to the camp was not their intermingling, a 'melting pot' phenomenon, but their grouping by fraction (see Photo 5).[59]

That the fractions were able to group their housing in this way in many camps, a fact that Bourdieu fails to explain, came about through a combination of the negotiating power of the *djemâa* elders, and the acceptance by the civil planning authorities, including the influential SAS officers, that ethic grouping was functional to the smooth management of the big settlement.[60] Despite the Rocard report of April 1959, which blew the whistle on the appalling conditions in many camps, the civil authorities, especially with the arrival of the liberal Gaullist Paul Delouvrier as *Délégué général* on 19 December 1958, ushered in the 'thousand village' initiative and an attempt to contain the anarchic, military practice of simply uprooting and dumping mountain peasants behind barbed wire in unprepared, 'temporary' camps.[61] Bugnicourt showed through a comparative study of new settlements in Morocco, Tunisia, the USSR, and Israel that rational planning favoured the formation of 'the mono-ethnic village', and the grouping of peasants from the same tribe or clan.[62] The key message of the conclusion to his book was that successful planning of new villages required full consultation with 'the natural community', and the active support of those who were to live there, mainly through the *djemâa* assembly.[63] In effect, SAS officers, who played a key role in

[58] P. Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le déracinement*, 28, 42, 204–13.

[59] P. Bourdieu and A. Sayad, *Le déracinement*, this is particularly evident on the map (p. 28) that locates the fractions of Ouled Mehdi, Zebala, Hamzet, Meharza, Laghouati, Tigzert, Ouled Haffif, and Brairi.

[60] This pattern is confirmed by Xavier de Planhol, 'Les nouveax villages', *Revue africaine* 105 (1961), 29–30, who maps the segregated location of three fractions in the camp of Oued el Haad.

[61] M. Cornaton, *Les regroupements*, 67, on 31 March 1959 Delouvrier took control of all *regroupement* operations, required prior approval of any plans, and in November established General Parlange as head of an *Inspection générale*.

[62] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 29–31.

[63] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 329–31.

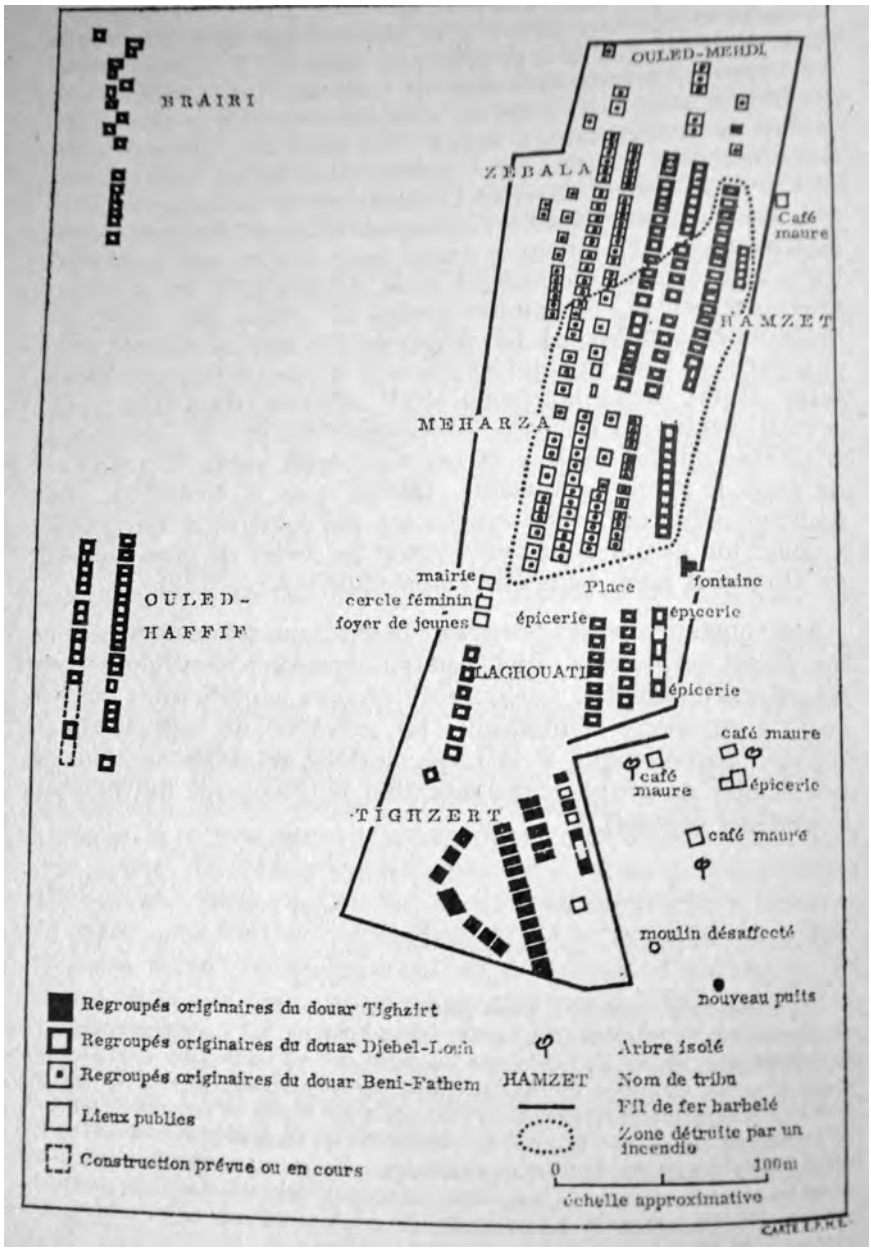

Photo 5 The spatial formation of *douar* or fraction groups in the *regroupement* camp of Matmata in the eastern Chelif, from Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *Le déracinement*, 28. Copyright Édition de Minuit.

the creation of many *regroupement* camps and were closest to the terrain, did so by negotiating the resettlement of entire fractions with the *djemâa* leaders and respected their preferences.[64]

The peasant preference for grouping by fraction inside the camps arose from a wish to preserve the working unity of the community and its forms of self-regulation, and also its honour by not exposing women to the eyes of 'strangers'. In those instances where peasants had been dumped from army lorries into makeshift camps, and forced to mix with unknown people, they later tried wherever possible to reorganize themselves by swapping houses in order to reconstitute clan or extended family groups.[65]

It was undoubtedly the case that where peasants were displaced considerable distances, usually from the *zones interdites* of the higher mountain down to the plain, their contact with their land was broken. This happened, for example, with the inhabitants of the *douar* Djebel Louh who relocated in the Matmata camp were three hours walking distance from their abandoned farms.[66] The same was true for the inhabitants of the *douar* Merdja resettled in the camp of Djebrabra, who were reduced to surviving on army rations and day labouring and would not be able to reverse the process of 'dépaysannization' since their fields and forest grazing areas were too distant and inaccessible in a danger zone. But in many instances the authorities attempted to locate camps so that displaced populations would be able to continue working their land on a daily basis. The *Commission de réforme agraire* of Orleansville, of which Bugnicourt was a member, adopted a radius of 3 kilometres as a norm within which inhabitants could continue to work their farms.[67]

With Independence many peasants who attempted to return to their lands faced great difficulty and abandoned the project: their houses had been burned down or demolished by the army, cultivated fields had returned to scrub and were invaded by wild boars, while extensive tracts of forest had been destroyed by

[64] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 26; in the case of the *douar* of Sobha in the Chelif region, the SAS officer had in January 1959 made proposals for the transfer of four thousand peasants from fourteen fractions into a single mega-camp.

[65] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 309; P. Bourdieu, *Le déracinement*, 154, quotes a man from the Djebabra camp, where such arrangements were difficult: 'Between relatives it's good to have the doors facing each other, but when there are strangers, better not. If we had been asked to build the village, we would have provided *mechtas* for each family.' When new houses that were being built were allocated, 'you have to watch out to make sure that all the relatives are neighbours'. Algerian migrants sought in a similar way to maintain family networks and the privacy of gendered space in the shanty towns of Paris; see Neil MacMaster, 'Shantytown Republics: Algerian Migrants and the Culture of Space in the Bidonvilles', ch. 4 in Hafid Gafaiti, Patricia M. E. Lorcin, and David G. Troyansky (eds), *Transnational Spaces and Identities in the Franchphone World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 73–93.

[66] P. Bourdieu, *Le déracinement*, 206

[67] J. Bugnicourt, *Les nouveaux centres*, 133–6, provides maps for three centres in the *douar* Herenfa showing the distances involved.

napalm.[68] Before the start of the war the isolated *douars* of the high mountains had faced the greatest levels of endemic poverty, and many of those who had become habituated to life in the camps, despite nostalgia for their life in the hills, preferred to stay in the plain where the opportunities for waged employment and access to schools, medical care, and other services was better.[69] As Michel Cornaton discovered during his extensive fieldwork during 1963–5 into the former camps, many of them had not been closed on independence but expanded to become large urban centres.[70] However, there were many other mountain communities, like that of Metidja in the Ouarsenis, that managed to survive *in situ* throughout the war, while the more well-to-do 'middle peasants' of the piedmont were often able to avoid displacement into the camps and prospered through some of the opportunities to buy up the livestock of the uprooted and to use camp inmates as a pool of cheap labour.[71] Bourdieu describes the *douar* of Ouled Ziad in the Chelif to the west of Orleansville as exceptional, in the extent to which it was able to avoid *regroupement* while conserving all the features of an integrated community and large, extended family groups that practised traditional agriculture.[72] However, the Ouled Ziad were quite typical of the traditional, but economically dynamic families that inhabited large farmhouses in the long ribbon of the piedmont that stretched along the entire northern and southern perimeter of the Chelif valley.

To sum up, while Bourdieu was correct to emphasize the extent of the massive dislocation of Algerian rural society, it is not so clear that this resulted in a process by which a traditional peasantry was uniformly tipped over into an irreversible proletarianization. Rather, the map of the Chelif region reflected an extraordinarily complex mosaic, from an acceleration of uprooted peasants that flowed from the interior to settle permanently into the *bidonvilles*, to members of the large, extended *ayla* that occupied solid farmhouses. The sociologist Claudine Chaulet in her research on post-Independence rural society found, despite the massive dislocation of rural society during the Algerian War, that the *ayla* remained the dominant form of social organization well into the 1970s. Unlike Bourdieu, who depicted the 'traditional' peasant as a tragic victim of forces beyond his control, Chaulet emphasized the extent to which peasants were actors that were capable of a tactical response to crisis, even when their margin for manoeuvre was severely constrained by occupying forces.

[68] M. Cornaton, *Les regroupements*, 164, 209.

[69] P. Bourdieu, *Le déracinement*, 126; M. Cornaton, *Les regroupements*, 231.

[70] Typically when Monique Eoche-Duval, *Madame SAS*, 286–94, returned to Sidi Naamane in 2005, it was to a thriving town of 15,000 inhabitants. On the post-Independence 'thousand villages', see Djaffar Lesbet, *Les 1000 villages socialiste en Algérie* (Paris: Syros, 1983).

[71] P. Bourdieu, *Le déracinement*, 125–6, even within the camp of Djebabra, the 'middle peasants' of the piedmont continued to work their fields, using the labour of the 'Montagnards' Merdja who were cut off from their distant farms.

[72] P. Bourdieu, *Le déracinement*, 23, 59, 106.

For the military the main strategic purpose of the *regroupement* camps was to place the population in barbed-wire compounds with watchtowers so that they would be 'protected' and isolated from contact with the FLN. But, in reality, the SAS officers were unable to administer the larger camps that held two thousand or three thousand people, without working through the heads of household or the clan leaders that had always coordinated and controlled peasant communities. The army actively encouraged the formation of the *djemâa* inside the camps, micro-assemblies that were intended to form the core of the future municipalities, but such organization provided ideal conditions for the penetration of FLN networks.

Conclusion

Peasant Insurrection: A New Comparative Agenda

A key aim of this study has been to challenge the orthodox interpretation of the Algerian peasantry, before and during the War of Independence, as an inert mass, a class of 'people without history' that was devoid of political consciousness and unable to determine a destiny that was always decided by others. This interpretation has endured until recently, all the more powerful since shared by quite opposed currents of political thought, from colonial stereotypes of rural 'primitives', through orthodox Marxism and sociology, to the official nationalist narrative of the post-Independence Algerian state. The thesis that we have developed, that peasant society sustained dynamic and resilient forms of political organization and cultural resistance at the grassroots level, carries major implications for the understanding of the history of modern Algeria, both before, during, and after the War of Independence. I conclude by drawing out some of the wider implications for a future research agenda, and for a comparative framework that reaches out beyond the Chelif region to the rest of Algeria, as well as transnationally to the global study of peasant guerrilla wars.

How far were the changes that have been identified for the Chelif region typical of Algeria as a whole and can this 'model' be used to shed light on how anti-colonial nationalism spread throughout the Tell, and finally erupted in rural insurrection? The 5th Bureau specialists that launched *Opération Pilote* during 1957 selected the Chelif for this important COIN experiment because the region was one of dispersed rural settlement, a pattern that could be found across 90 per cent of the Tell. In this respect the geo-politics of the Chelif region may provide a surer guide to Algeria as a whole than the core Kabyle area of dense, nucleated villages that, while exceptional, has attracted historians, anthropologists, and sociologists, to the relative neglect of other regions.

The fact of dispersed settlement provides an important geo-political key to a historical understanding of modern Algeria. The political scientist Jeffrey Herbst has placed geographical dispersal at the centre of a comparative study in which he argues that African state formation under colonialism cannot be understood through the distorting lens of Europe where the nation developed from the fifteenth century in a continent of high population density. The colonial and

War in the Mountains: Peasant Society and Counterinsurgency in Algeria, 1918–1958. Neil MacMaster, Oxford University Press (2020). © Neil MacMaster.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198860211.001.0001

post-colonial state in Africa was confronted with huge expanses of thin population, 'atomistically dispersed across a vast hinterland that had few roads or telephones'.[1] The colonial state in sub-Saharan Africa, as in Algeria, characterized by Herbst as 'schizophrenic', developed a marked geographic dualism between dense zones of settler colonialism in the coastal urban centres and mining-industrial complexes, and the interior, devoid of roads and modern infrastructures. There exists a rich potential for a comparative study of Algerian decolonization in relation to sub-Saharan Africa and the enormous body of interpretation and analysis carried out by 'Africanists', in particular with relation to the political anthropology of Kenya and the 'Mau Mau' war.[2]

While at present the social history of Algerian rural society in the twentieth century remains sparse and chronologically and geographically fragmented, the pieces that we have of a bigger jig-saw tend to confirm that the pattern of geopolitical dualism of settler and peasant space, of urbanized plains and subsistence farming in the interior of the Chelif, could be found throughout the Tell. But more detailed confirmation awaits further research into other Algerian regions.

A second point of comparative analysis relates to the fact that under the system of colonial indirect rule to be found throughout the British and French empires, the continuity into the mid-twentieth century of 'traditional' or 'neo-tribal' forms of social and political organization did not entail the survival of unchanging age-old or archaic institutions. On the contrary the enduring nature of the pre-colonial *djemâa* derived in part from its dynamic and flexible qualities that enabled the community to adapt to the challenge of economic crisis, external threat, and warfare. Throughout the period of the *communes mixtes*, from 1863 to 1956, the *djemâa* evolved constantly under the impact of central government intervention, most significantly the Jonnart Law of 1919, which eventually opened the door to new forms of resistance through the expansion of mass electoral politics in the countryside.

A very similar process can be found, for example, in Vietnam where the French occupiers retained the pre-colonial village commune as an instrument of local government, including tax collection, civil registration, and regulation of land rights.[3] After 1900 the colonial administration in Vietnam used an identical language to that in Algeria to describe a system that was failing to reach the rural masses, a '*poussières d'hommes*'. However, all attempts to modernize the system and to assimilate it to an effective, centralized state apparatus, as with the

[1] J. Herbst, *States and Power*, 17.

[2] David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 292, remarks that of all the colonial wars that in Algeria 'offers the most meaningful parallel with Kenya'.

[3] Éric Gojosso, 'La commune annamite de Cochine: un instrument juridique de pacification', in Samia El Mechat (ed.), *Coloniser*, 231–44. The jurist Abel des Michels wrote in 1869, 'we found there an administration that was already well organized and all we had to do, after a few modifications, was to keep watch over it' (quoted, p. 233).

Algerian *communes mixtes* in Algeria, failed. Éric Gojosso concludes that colonial support of the quasi-autonomous village *commune* significantly protected or left intact at the grassroots a form of 'traditional' socio-political organization that gradually escaped government control and was finally to provide the base for the astonishing rapid spread of armed resistance after 1945. As the influential sociologist Paul Mus argued in 1952 the French, bogged down in an unwinnable war with the Vietminh, had made the error of dismissing the peasantry as a conservative, apathetic mass, whereas the village community, concealed behind bamboo stockades, had retained cohesion and power and the guerrilla revolution of Ho Chi Minh was fundamentally based on 'a network of villages that became the basis for armed resistance'.[4] French colonialism in Vietnam and Algeria, by protecting the integrity of thousands of traditional rural communities, ironically left in place the semi-autonomous forms of collective government that would eventually be welded into a national liberation movement.

A third comparative point to be made is that the Second World War provided a crucial watershed in precipitating the extraordinary, simultaneous explosion of anti-colonial movements across the French and British empires. Both attempted to cling to their colonies through the introduction of economic investment, developmentalism, and various constitutional manoeuvres. In the case of Algeria there was no official consensus as to a reform agenda and the political élite in Algiers and Paris remained throughout the decade 1944 to 1954 caught up in a bitter, internecine struggle between economic modernizers and settler reactionaries, a conflict that reached into the heart of the colonial establishment. At the core of this internal colonial battle was the burning issue of the rural masses that, locked into endemic poverty and a regime of '*sous-administration*', threatened to pass en bloc into the nationalist camp.

Bruce Berman, in his study of the roots of the Kenyan 'Mau Mau' revolt of 1952–62 among the Kikuyu of the Central Highlands, has analysed a similar terminal and violent crisis of the colonial regime. Conservative native administrators at the local level in Kenya, as in the Algerian *communes mixtes*, resisted change and played down the threat of peasant insurrection since nationalism was dismissed as the work of urban trouble-makers. The city was seen, notes Berman, as a 'source of subversion and corruption from which flowed a stream of detribalized agitators to disrupt rural tribal society'.[5] The Kenyan regime engaged in a 'developmental' programme centred on welfare, a minimal land redistribution and soil conservation, and, as with Lucien Paye's communal reform in Algeria, linked this to a reform of local government that would serve as a school for education in democracy. However, the global reform was sabotaged by the

[4] Paul Mus, *Vietnam. Sociologie d'une guerre* (Paris: Seuil, 1952), 22.

[5] Bruce Berman, 'Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence: Colonial Administration and the Origins of the 'Mau Mau' Emergency', ch. 10 in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley*, 248.

powerful settler lobby so that in a situation of post-war economic growth the peasantry remained locked into a deepening crisis. The promise of reform had only succeeded in radicalizing trade union demands and stoked up a revolution of rising expectations that drove the call for independence.[6]

By 1945 the writing was on the wall for settler colonialism in Algeria and Kenya. In that year the nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta warned the white minority of the dangers of stifling the legitimate demands of the Africans who 'make their claim for justice now, in order that a bloodier and more destructive justice may not be inevitable in time to come'.[7] This warning came at the very moment that General Duval, after crushing the peasant insurrection of May 1945 in the Constantinois, gave a chilling warning to the Europeans, 'I have given you ten years of peace; but if France sits idle, everything will start again for the worse and probably in a terminal way'.[8]

In Algeria and Kenya, both settler colonies, the failure of the Europeans that dominated the political system to heed such warnings led into a cycle of deepening violence. The Naegelen repressive turn in early 1948 aimed to cynically crush the growing electoral surge in rural nationalism, banged the door shut on a negotiated and peaceful process of French decolonization and opened the way to a peasant insurgency. At the same time an extended lease of life was given to the moribund *commune mixte* system, so that the colonial regime failed to resolve the contradictions between support for rural governance through 'traditional' neo-tribal élites, and that of a local government reform that would involve replacing such conservative élites by a modernizing, technocratic state apparatus. The resulting paralysis of government, caught between 'traditionalism and modernity', continued into the War of Independence and on into the post-colonial era.

This unresolved tension, that reflected the deeply entrenched nature of geo-political dualism of plain and mountain, also haunted the nationalist movement. The leading cadres of the Communist and Messalist parties, that first consolidated their base in the towns, mines, and factories of metropolitan France, before moving into the urban centres of northern Algeria during the 1930s, were deeply shaped by the political culture and electoral party system of France. To an extent emerging nationalism reproduced or reflected the geo-political dualism of Algeria and, from its urban base, freed itself with some difficulty from the colonialist perception of supine peasant masses to arrive at a growing recognition of the strong autonomous traditions of the rural community. As the infant FLN took its first, tentative steps to organize a guerrilla base in the mountains, it adjusted rapidly and skilfully to build a popular support base that took full advantage of the existing joint family and clan networks. Instead of eliminating all the *caids* and

[6] See Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

[7] B. Berman, 'Bureaucracy', 243.

[8] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Origines*, 333.

forest guards, and dismantling the entire *commune mixte* system, as has often been thought, the FLN splintered the *caidat* in half, producing the conditions for a civil war, and infiltrated deeply into the local colonial administration.

But the success of the FLN in harnessing the latent strength and dynamism of the peasant community, was paid for at the cost of recognizing and often reinforcing the conservative religious-backed patrimonialism of rural society. This created an unresolved tension, parallel to that faced by the colonial military, between cultivation of a deeply entrenched Islamic conservatism and a project that would dissolve narrow 'tribalism' and regionalism and unite all under the flag of modernity and a single Algerian nation. Throughout the Algerian War the FLN was plagued with the difficulty of containing and eradicating the divisive impacts of neo-tribal regionalism that refused, as in the Nemenchta region, to acquiesce with the Jacobin centralism of the Soummam conference.[9]

The survival of joint family and fraction-*djemâa* networks throughout the massive dislocation of the Algerian War carries major implications for our understanding of contemporary post-Independence history. As the sociologist Lahouari Addi and others have argued, powerful extended family, patriarchal and clientele systems have survived in Algeria.[10] Mounira Charrad demonstrates one consequence of this in the inability of the post-Independence state, stalled between 'traditionalism and modernity', to legislate on the crucial area of Islamic family law and women's rights until the reactionary code of 1984. In recent years political scientists have shown a deepening interest in the comparative study of clientelism in the Middle East and North Africa, and this promises to open new research perspectives on the turbulent history of contemporary Algeria, including the rise of Islamic radicalism.[11]

A further comparative implication of *War in the Mountain* is the light that it sheds on the failure of psychological warfare operations in the twenty-first century, in particular in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon prepared for the Iraqi invasion of 2003 by screening Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, turning to Alistair

[9] G. Meynier, *Histoire intérieure*, 383–406; E. Alcaraz, *Lieux de mémoire*, ch. 5.

[10] Lahouari Addi, *Les mutations de la société algérienne* (1999); Y. B. Hounet, *L'Algérie des tribus*; M. Hachemaoui, *Clientélisme et patronage dans l'Algérie contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2013). Hounet and Hachemaoui both trace the continuity of patrimonial politics in relation to the fringes of the northern Sahara, zones that are not typical of the Tell since tribal structures survived there much later into the twentieth century. The most detailed sociological evidence of the post-Independence survival of the joint family and clientelism, and its ready adaptability to economic modernization in the Tell, is Claudine Chaulet, 3 vols, *La terre, les Frères et l'argent* (Algiers: OPU, 1987). The sociologist Khelifa Bouzebra, 'Culture and Political Mobilization in Algeria', Ph.d., University of East Anglia (1982), based on rural fieldwork during the 1970s, also found that personal alliances ('*El-Maarifa*') remained dominant in gaining access to power and resources.

[11] Daniel Corstange, *The Price of a Vote*, 1–2, notes that clientelism means that 'citizens offer up their political support to élites not because of programmes or ideology', but in exchange for payoffs handed out to constituencies 'based on sect, tribe, extended family and region'.

Horne's outdated history *A Savage War of Peace* as a point of reference, and eventually revived the historic lessons of the Algerian War through a new US Army *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* that drew significantly on the work of the French commander David Galula.[12] American COIN specialists resurrected the French doctrine of revolutionary warfare, the idea that modern insurgency could not be defeated by conventional forces but only through political, economic, psychological, and civic actions that would win over the population. Field-Manual 3-24 claimed that insurgencies often held power through 'religious, clan, or tribal authority', and could be defeated by 'co-opting the responsible traditional authority figure'.[13]

As with *Opération Pilote*, the US forces recruited anthropologists to penetrate the arcane workings of Afghan tribal society. But, as I write, US-Afghan representatives are currently negotiating with the Taliban, seventeen years after the American invasion, for US troop withdrawal and an eventual cease-fire. How the most powerful army in the world faced defeat at the hands of supposedly archaic mountain tribesmen, as it had decades earlier in the rice fields of Vietnam, perplexed western generals and observers.[14] But our investigation of the 'inside' story of *Opération Pilote* provides some possible answers to this conundrum. As in Algeria the anthropological and psychological 'expertise' of the Human Terrain System (HTS) advisers deployed in Afghanistan was woefully inadequate, since recruits often lacked linguistic or cultural knowledge of the different ethnic groups.[15] More to the point, commanders remained wedded to the strategies of conventional warfare and the use of tank, artillery, and aerial bombardment that deployed so-called 'kinetic' force (i.e. killings) and inflicted heavy casualties on civil populations, rapidly subverting any gains that were being slowly and carefully built up by 'hearts and minds' operations. Western military repeatedly underestimated the extraordinary organizational potential of peasant societies to fight unconventional wars. The military in Algeria systematically concealed the failure of *Opération Pilote* and produced falsified data to demonstrate the claimed success of a COIN experiment that was then rapidy extended across the colony. The

[12] For an acerbic critique of the failure of contemporary COIN strategies, see Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013). The new *US Army Field Manual No. 3–24*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2007.

[13] *Field Manual No. 3–24*, 21–4.

[14] On the cultural blindness of western armed forces, see Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern Ways through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst, 2009).

[15] The HTS programme that ran from 2005 to 2014 recruited teams of anthropologists and sociologists to provide 'cultural intelligence' to operational commanders on tribal societies in which terrorist networks were embedded. The project was subjected to a withering critique by the American Anthropological Society and others; see Robert J. Gonzalez, 'Human Terrain: Past, Present and Future Applications', *Anthropology Today* 24.1 (2008), 21–6, and the online Wikipedia article, 'Human Terrain System'.

'Afghanistan Papers' disclosed by the *Washington Post* in December 2019 likewise revealed the massive failure of the long war that, through falsified metrics and the 'bright shining lie' of self-deception, was likewise celebrated as a huge success.[16]

In recent years sociologists and historians have developed the theory of 'contentious politics' that has served to challenge the dominant, Marxist-inspired, teleological interpretation of peasant revolt as 'primitive' social movements that acted as a brake on the Hegelian movement towards proletarian revolution or capitalist modernity and 'progress'.[17] As I have argued, the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu on the Algerian peasantry conformed to this teleology. John Chalcraft in his overview of popular movements in the Middle East breaks out from the corset of 'progress', the pattern of history as a sequence of inevitable stages, to study the dynamics and meaning of such movements to the actors involved.[18] So-called archaic or 'tribal' rural societies were frequently able to offer a far more radical and sophisticated challenge to incumbent European states than mere acts of cattle maiming and banditry.

To understand how the FLN succeeded after 1954 in welding disparate peasant societies across the great reach of northern Algeria into a guerrilla army it is worth comparing it to the great anti-colonial insurrections in the Moroccan Rif from 1921 to 1926 and in Libya from 1911 to 1932.[19] In the Rif in 1921 Abd El-Krim crushed the Spanish army at Anual and created a counter-state apparatus that was able to organize a sophisticated logistic network of material, money, and arm supplies and even constructed an internal telephone system.[20] Even more instructive for the Algerian situation was the long, Second Italo-Sanussi War of 1923–32 during which nomadic forces led by Omar al-Mukhatar tied down the Italians, and likewise constructed a proto-state that was able to raise taxes and organize international food and arms supplies, especially from across the Egyptian border.[21] The anthropologist Evans-Pritchard, who served in the region during the Second World War, famously analysed Libyan society in terms of a segmentary theory that greatly influenced later scholarly debate on Morocco and Algeria.

[16] *Sunday Observer*, 15 December 2019.

[17] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).

[18] J. Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, Introduction, 1–52, for a theorization of contentious politics applied to North Africa and the Middle East.

[19] J. Chalcraft, *Popular Politics*, 203–6, 229–40.

[20] Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Rif in the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: OUP, 2002). Abd El-Krim, after escaping from the French, founded in Cairo in 1948 the *Comité de libération du Maghreb arabe*, which supported the liberation struggle in Algeria.

[21] Enzo Santarelli (ed.), *Omar al-Mukhtar: The Italian Reconquest of Libya* (London: Darf Publishers, 1986); David Atkinson, 'Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance: Domination and Resistance in Cyrenica, 1923–32', in Joanne P. Sharp et al. (eds), *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000), 93–121.

According to this, 'in such segmentary systems there is no state and no government as we understand these institutions', so that 'authority is distributed at every point of the tribal structure'.[22]

The key question raised here, as throughout the Maghreb, is how peasants and nomads that inhabited such an invertebrate society, divided up into a myriad of small autonomous communities, could ever amalgamate into an effective, nationalist liberation movement. In Libya this role was fulfilled by the sufi Sanussi order that had established a network of 146 religious centres or lodges that spanned Cyrenica, Egypt, Arabia, and Sudan and cemented a sense of cohesion among pastoralists through a powerful call to a millenarian jihad. The Italian military response to this was to conduct a brutal campaign of 'pacification' that prefigured the French war in Algeria, one that included the construction of a barbed-wire wall along the Egyptian border, and the forced resettlement of nomads into concentration camps.[23]

The abortive peasant insurrection of 1945 in the Constantinois helps shed light on this issue of mobilization, and the underlying motivations of the peasantry in risking all on such a dangerous step into armed resistance. The Setif bloodbath on 8 May 1945 rapidly triggered a wave of peasant attacks on European farms and townships in the surrounding region, a classic unplanned rural revolt which was all too easily crushed by the military. Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, in her fine study *Aux origines de la guerre d'Algérie*, as late as 2002 tended to reflect the conventional topos of the peasantry as a spontaneous, visceral, and elemental 'tribal' force that crudely butchered Europeans with axes and bill hooks in a 'murderous craze (*folie meutrière*)', a 'blind vengeance'.[24]

However, looked at from another angle, the wave of rural violence in May 1945, even if not planned by the PPA, tells us a great deal about how the peasantry viewed the colonial order. In particular violence, far from being entirely 'spontaneous' and anarchic, was structured and targeted the key agents and buildings of the local colonial state. Among those assassinated were two *commune mixte* administrators, twelve forest guards, a market collector, post office workers, and four magistrates; and in addition to cutting telephone and railway lines, electricity and water supplies, they gutted a tax office and SIP docks.[25] The rare incidents of *jacquerie* violence in Algeria between 1900 and 1954, like that at Margueritte and

[22] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 59. This theorization lay at the heart of Ernest Gellner's book, *Saints of the Atlas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), a theory that in turn influenced the work of his pupil in Algiers, Jeanne Favret-Saada.

[23] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi*, 198–9; Graziani's aim was to destroy Bedouin mobility by a process of villagization that would 'compel them to build houses, abandoning the tents', and to transform them into wage-labourers that were to be pegged down under firm state control.

[24] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Aux origines*, 271, 305.

[25] A. Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Aux origines*, 274–5, 297–8, 305. C. Mauss-Copeaux, *Algérie, 20 août 1955*, has analysed a similar pattern in the 1955 peasant massacres.

in Setif, although rapidly crushed by the colonial state, are of considerable interest since they dramatically reveal in a fleeting moment the deeply buried, permanent state of peasant hostility to the colonial order, a potentiality that lay dormant, ever ready to burst to the surface when the conditions were right.

The success of the FLN in creating a guerrilla movement in the interior was built essentially on effecting a juncture between urban-based nationalists and the dormant anti-colonialism of peasant society. The Messalists, engaging in an auto-critique after Setif, were fully aware that unplanned or ill-coordinated peasant revolts inevitably terminated not only in bloody repression, but also inflicted massive damage on the careful and long-term construction of a liberation movement.[26] The remarkable success of the post-1945 Communist Party, the PPA, and eventually the FLN in initiating a war of liberation was to have succeeded in building up urban-rural networks between 1945 and 1954 that would enable the integration of thousands of peasant micro-communities into a single, centrally co-ordinated directorate, an organization that was finally put in place at the Soummam conference of August 1956.[27]

A further, potentially fruitful line of approach towards a future history of rural Algeria and the War of Independence is provided by the recent interest in the theory of 'rebel governance'.[28] Through the comparative study of civil wars and insurrections from Latin America to Africa and Asia, researchers have begun to explore how insurgents, far from deploying coercion and terror towards the civil population they seek to dominate (although that may happen), more often seek to interact with rural society in ways that replicate those of the state. It is important to examine pre-conflict history since rebel governance built on earlier forms of state organization and politics, and adapted or 'captured' existing forms of local administration. Zachariah Mampilly notes that rebels must 'tap into and even co-opt pre-existing institutions and networks of power'.[29]

The rural governance approach shows how rebels, recognizing the difficulty of exerting control over the mass of peasants scattered through vast mountainous expanses, generally entered into a dialogue, and cooperated with rural

[26] The same conclusion was reached by Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party after the abortive peasant revolts of 1930–1 and 1940; see Neil MacMaster, 'Constitution d'une base paysanne: comparison des guérillas au Vietnam et en Algérie, entre 1940 et 1962', in Christopher Goscha and Sylvie Thénault (eds), 'Maghreb-Indochine, comparaisons impériales', *Monde(s): histoire espaces relation* 12 (2017), 121–40.

[27] J. Craig Jenkins, 'Why Do Peasants Rebel? Structural and Historical Theories of Modern Peasant Rebellions', *American Journal of Sociology* 88.3 (1982), 487–514, concludes that the essential ingredient in revolutionary peasant movements was the role of large-scale organizations in welding together the myriad of fragmented peasant micro-units that, otherwise, engaged in futile *jacqueries*.

[28] The new approach that developed from 2008 onwards led to the publication by Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (eds), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015); see also the Rebel Governance Network, online <https://rebelgovernance.weebly.com>, consulted 10 September 2019.

[29] A. Arjan et al. (eds), *Rebel Governance*, 228.

communities in setting up guerrilla organizations. Even doctrinaire communist movements often compromised and established alliances with local economic and political élites. Rebels have often been able to provide forms of governance, for example in the provision of dispute resolution and justice, that were welcomed by peasants as more effective than that of the, largely absent, state.

The essays in Arjona, in focusing on rebel organizations, tend to ignore the relationship to the parallel COIN governance that the state often tried to deploy, a counter-reform agenda or hearts and minds strategy. In the Chelif, during *Opération Pilote*, the ALN guerrilla and the French psychological warfare operations entered into a kind of 'war of governance', a battle over the provision of schools, medical services, justice, and family benefits. In this there was a certain, complex imitation of the methods of what Germaine Tillion described as the 'complimentary enemy', but in general it was a battle in which the French were heavily disadvantaged against Muslim combatants that shared the religion, culture, language, and identity of the rural population.

Where the rebels were most disadvantaged in attempts to develop a counter-state governance was in the difficulty of securing control over a particular terrain long enough to establish stable and enduring organizations and to reassure the inhabitants that they could protect them from incumbent forces and COIN operations. It is important to map how rebel forces, at any moment in time, might control secure base-zones in some areas, but be fragile and fleeting in another. Rebels might dominate at night, while incumbents did so in daylight. The evidence from the Chelif is that the ability of the FLN to carve out and control 'safe zones' may have reached a peak during late 1956 to early 1958, after which the French shifted to policies of mass *regroupement*, specialized *commando de chasse* units, and the hugely destructive Challe offensives.

The FLN responded adeptly to this challenge in two ways: it broke up the large *katibas* of about a hundred fighters into much smaller units that could more readily evade French sweep operations and created a logistics that enabled the ALN to break free from over-dependency on provision of food, housing, and other assistance by the civilian population. The dominance of the Maoist image of the guerrilla supported by the peasantry like fish in water has obscured the transformations taking place in the ALN. Elisabeth Wood located a similar evolution in El Salvador where the guerrilla forces of the FMLN, in response to the growing capacity of government troops to deploy rapidly by helicopter, to bomb controlled zones, and to wreak violence on the population, responded by breaking up large battalion-sized forces.[30] Wood shows how this successful change in strategy has been misjudged by many as a sign of declining military capacity, a position that we also find among historians of the Algerian War.

[30] E. Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 28, 134–5.

Finally, I would underscore the extent to which the long-term perceived quietism and 'fatalism' of peasant society in the Chelif was dramatically fractured after 1943 by a new political consciousness of popular empowerment. However, the apparent acquiescence of the peasantry in the colonial order from 1870 to 1943, a quietness closely related to patron-client structures, should not be misread as a fatalistic acceptance of French power. As Howard Newby notes deference does not mean subservience but the 'necessary pose of the powerless', a position shared by James Scott in his analysis of the 'weapons of the weak'.[31] During the 1940s a number of externalities impinged on the Chelif to shatter the long-established acquiescence of the peasantry, including the return of soldiers and migrant workers, the military defeat of the French, and the spread of trade unionism, socialism, and nationalism that had been incubated in the cities. But such exogenous forces of radicalization also met up, and coalesced, with a deep and largely hidden endogenous tradition of resistance that had been kept alive within the joint family and fraction, the crucial vectors of memory. The potency of that political culture is that it was not confined to poor subsistence agro-pastoralists but was equally shared and kept alive by the rural élites, the middle peasants, and *grandes familles*, from which the French recruited the key agents of indirect rule. This proved to be a ticking time bomb for French hegemony as the colonial intelligence state found to its cost after 1954 when suddenly stripped of the means to control mountain society through the *caids* it was once again reduced, as it had been in 1900, to an amorphous and ungraspable '*poussières des hommes*'.

This goes some way to confirm Mostefa Lacheraf's analysis that despite the historic devastation of rural society, there remained an essential 'unity of the peasant world', a '*patriotisme rural*', that was nurtured and transmitted across the generations.[32] Central to this was the popular belief that French occupation and settler colonialism was a temporary phenomenon that, in some indeterminate future, would end in departure. Bachir Hadjadj in his memoirs recounts how his great-grandfather, the religious teacher Hadj Saad, on approaching death solemnly requested his grandson, Brahim, to promise that when the French eventually departed, which was bound to happen sooner or later, he would stand at his tomb and loudly proclaim 'Saad, son of Theldja', and repeat three times 'France has departed!', which Hadj would hear, wherever he was above.[33] Before 1954 the elder notables that controlled politics in the fraction *djemâas* tended to act as a brake on foolhardy engagement by youths in armed insurrection which they

[31] H. Newby, *Deferential Worker*, 111; James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1987).

[32] M. Lacheraf, *L'Algérie*, ch. 2, 'Le patriotism rural', 69–87, reprinted from *Esprit*, March 1955.

[33] B. Hadjadj, *Les voleurs*, 94. Paul Mus, *Vietnam*, 20–6, claims that a similar, religious-inspired conviction of an inevitable French departure was to be found in the Vietnamese village, the 'inviolable sanctuary' that kept alive an 'underground resistance' to the occupier.

knew, from bitter group memory, had always terminated in massive, collective repression. But in the Chelif after 1943 the message of the nationalists of the PPA in the Dahra and Ouarsenis mountains was that that moment had now arrived.

The aggressive anti-colonial campaign led by peasant propagandists in the Dahra and Ouarsenis during 1947 to 1954 reveal a simple but consistent message, that can be summarized in a number of points. First the nationalists set out to overcome peasant reticence that resistance to the all-powerful French military and police power was folly by the argument that French imperialism was crumbling rapidly and on the verge of collapse as shown by the war in Vietnam and, more recently, in Tunisia. The Algerian liberation struggle, peasants were reassured, would be supported by the intervention of other Muslim powers, notably Egypt. Peasants should act now to erode the local administration through various forms of civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes, refusal to work as harvesters for *colons* farmers, and were promised, as they had so often demanded, a supply of modern guns. Liberation would mark an end to the daily humiliation (*hogra*) of colonialism, break the grip of Christian or infidel occupiers (*roumis*), and restore the land that had been stolen from them and their ancestors. An identical, almost simplistic formulation, the promise of land and freedom from a morally unjust system, can be found at the core of anti-colonial insurrections around the world. In Kenya, for example, Mau Mau militants like Waruhui Itote ('General China') administered night-time oaths to secret gatherings of hundreds of peasants who were told, 'the British had taken our land and we have dedicated ourselves to the fight for liberty'.[34] European expulsion and the 'restoration' of millions of hectares of the richest agricultural land to famished peasants was the key mobilizing issue in Kenya as it was in the Chelif.[35]

The ALN political commissars that rapidly worked their way through the hundreds of fractions of the Dahra and Ouarsenis calling night-time meetings at which they addressed massed groups and established new organizational cells, the *nizam*, certainly brought a new propaganda message that went beyond the 'traditional' call for land, in particular that all needed to share in a primary allegiance to a new nation and identity that rose above the narrow confines of clans, *çofs*, *maraboutism*, and regionalism. The global synthesis of 'rural patriotism' and FLN policy at the end of the day contained little in the way of detailed ideology or party doctrine. But quite crucially when peasants made the decision to 'go over' to the armed liberation struggle they did so, not as individuals, but as members of joint, patriarchal families and micro-community lineage groups.

[34] Waruhiui Itote (General China), '*Mau Mau' General* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 50.

[35] David Anderson, *The Eroding Commons: The Political Ecology in Baringo, Kenya 1890–1963* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 10, puts it well: 'access to and control of land and its basic resources are, of essence, political issues in all societies, but are especially important where the bulk of the population continues to gain its direct subsistence from agricultural production'.

The ALN commander Abderrahmane Krimi recounts how on the night of the holy celebration of Ashura 1955, his patriarchal father called together the joint family and made a formal oath by which he bound both himself, his sons, and other members of his household to the national cause. 'Listen everyone! France, that men have decided to drive from our land, is defeated; she is going, going. . . . Nobody is allowed, man or woman, child or adult, to evade the Holy war (*djihad*) chosen by God. He who does so is not one of us. I pray to God to make me the first martyr!'.[36] The FLN militant Louisette Ighilahriz, recounts a similar moment, although this was in the urban household of an Algiers baker. Her father, after his evening meal, solemnly called the family together and, in response to the outbreak of the revolt on 1 November 1954, declared that the age of humiliation (*hogra*) was over: 'The *hogra*, that's enough! The hour is grave. It's the revolution. I make a sacrifice of your lives to Algeria. You understand? Now each one of you must carry out his duty.'[37] The cement of revolutionary nationalism was as much one of group solidarity as of ideological committment.

[36] A. Krimi, *Mémoires*, 44.
[37] Lousette Ighilhariz, *Algérienne* (Paris: Fayard/Calmann-Lévy, 2001), 43–4.

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